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Trees Of Life

The passion that bonsai evokes is said to inspire an almost spiritual devotion

Make the art of bonsai your next hobby **p.72**

Seeking Southern Comfort

What's more beautiful than the shift of moods and the way the spice notes layer and change as we journey from province to province in our inexplicably beautiful country? What's more inviting than the enormously cosy fires of every intensity and setting if one stepped across enough thresholds? I argue that few things compare.

In this issue we celebrate simply that: winter's comfort found however we please. If this is a time for winter games with your furry family members, Helen guides us (page 96) on how to do that on days where cold ground simply won't do. And while we keep warm and safe indoors, our adventurous friends give us a peek into the beautiful Eastern Cape gem that is Hogsback (page 92).

For decor inspiration, we take to the country to explore a stylishly quirky barn on a converted dairy farm (page 28) and hop off the grid and into the welcomed comfort of an outdoor hot tub (tipple in hand, of course) in the Klein Karoo (page 38).

As for our winter gardens, Madison reminds us that aloe is more than a tincture (page 54), while Jane makes sure that life hands us only the loveliest lemons from which to squeeze delicious zest (page 84).

We do hope you stay present, wrap up and enjoy the beauty of our country's vast, truly magnificent southern winter. And remember that the tub of leftovers in your fridge, or that blanket hidden in the back of your closet, is far better off helping someone in need stay fed and warm. Open your heart, and wrap up some toes!

Stefanie

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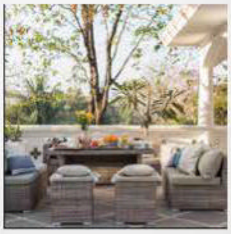

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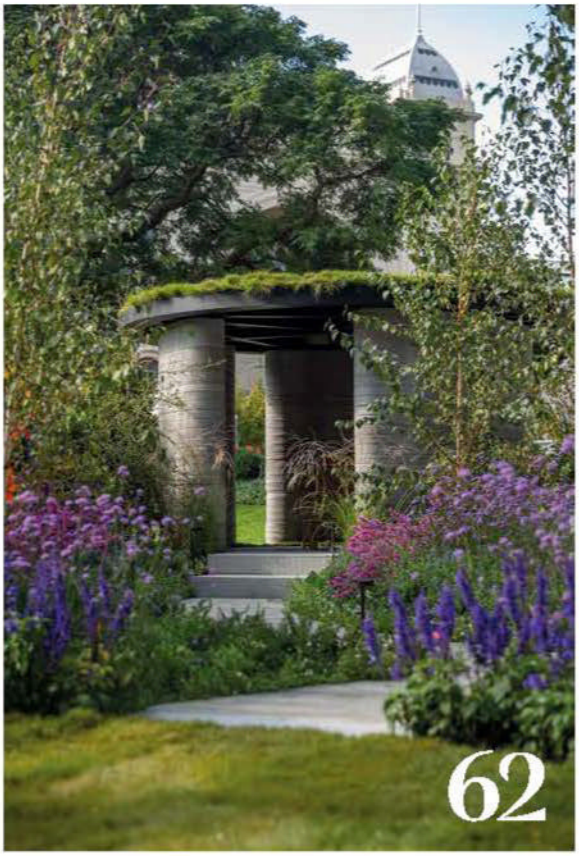

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If cold feet are the reason your significant other avoids you like the plague in winter weather, toast your toes well before bed and secure those cosy cuddles on a budget! **Warm Me Up Feet Warmer Dog Beige R239.95, Dis-Chem**

Think we forgot about your beloved pooch? NEVER. Poetry has a few stunning jumper designs that match with fur mama's choice. It's a match made in wintery heaven! **Romie Dog Jumper R399, Poetry**

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Dreading the cold creep of tension in your neck and shoulders as you move around the house? I'm hinting at my nearest and dearest to treat me to a wellbeing heating neck and shoulder wrap infused with calming aromatherapy. **Wellbeing Electric Heating/Cooling Neck & Shoulder Wrap R499, Bash**

Stay warm this winter with a gorgeous knit-covered hot water bottle. The perfect solution to rainy day traffic, their muted tones and bobble accents make for a luxurious hotty botty moment on the move. **Chunky Knitted Bobble Hot Water Bottle R475, Poetry**

A great gift for a mama expecting a winter bub, this adorable, 3 TOG-rated sleepy bag will have baby snuggled and cosy throughout the cold season. **The Winter Sleepy Bag R499.99, Cotton On Kids**

If we must leave...

Winter is more social for some than others. If you're prone to hibernation, these trips may be worth your most stylish layers to brave the outdoors

DECOREX CAPE TOWN

When? 22-25 June
Where? CTICC, Cape Town

You can look forward to this chapter of Decorex with a host of special features at Decorex, 100% Design and Design Cape Town, which include curated exhibitions, eateries, a bar, a Bespoke Cooking Theatre by Samsung and product launches galore.

One of the event's main drawcards, the Future of Design Studio, has a stellar line-up of SA's most respected design authorities who will deliver talks and participate in panel discussions on some of the most compelling issues that are currently facing the design industry.

For more info and to book your tickets, visit *decorex.co.za*

KNYSNA OYSTER FESTIVAL

When? 30 June to 9 July
Where? Knysna

Knysna's Oyster Festival has been a roaring success since 1983, when it was still called the Knysna Winter Festival. Attracting sport enthusiasts, families, food- and wine-lovers and adrenaline junkies, the festival offers something for everyone from running, cycling and golfing to wine tasting and, of course, oysters.

The festival is spread across 10 days, which includes two weekends. It boasts a varied programme, including cycling races for a few different levels of fitness.

For those that prefer 'exercise' of a different kind, the Knysna Wine Festival will be back, and the Knysna oyster will once again have the main stage. Wild oysters are harvested from the coastline around Knysna and will be served in a variety of ways – raw, cooked or steamed, as delectable concoctions or plain with a dash of lemon.

For more information, call +27 44 382 5510

THE GRAHAMSTOWN NATIONAL ARTS FESTIVAL

When? 22 June to 2 July
Where? 1820 Settlers National Monument, Fort Selwyn Drive, Makhanda, Grahamstown

Africa's largest and most colourful cultural event offers a choice of the very best of both indigenous and imported talent. Every year for 11 days in June and July, Grahamstown's population almost doubles, as over 50 000 people flock to the town for a feast of arts, crafts and entertainment.

From theatre to dance, opera to cabaret, fine art to crafts, classical music to jazz, poetry readings to lectures, every art form imaginable is represented in one of the most diverse festivals in the world. While many come to take in the arts, others simply want to be here for the spectacle or to market products ranging from tie-dyed T-shirts and woven rugs, to handmade jewellery and customised telephones.

For more information, call +27 46 603 1103

THE ROYAL SHOW

When? 26 May to 4 June
Where? The Royal Agricultural Showgrounds, Pietermaritzburg

This is the biggest event in KwaZulu-Natal and the Pietermaritzburg Royal Show attracts visitors from far and wide. The show has hundreds of craft and home industry exhibitions and stalls as well as competitions for birds, livestock and agricultural produce.

This is a show with a long history as its inception was 1851. Fondly known as 'The Royal', the show has about 13 different exhibition halls and 350 trade stands. Tons of entertainment is on the go during the show to keep the whole family busy, from concerts and firework displays to show-jumping... you will be busy for hours and hours.

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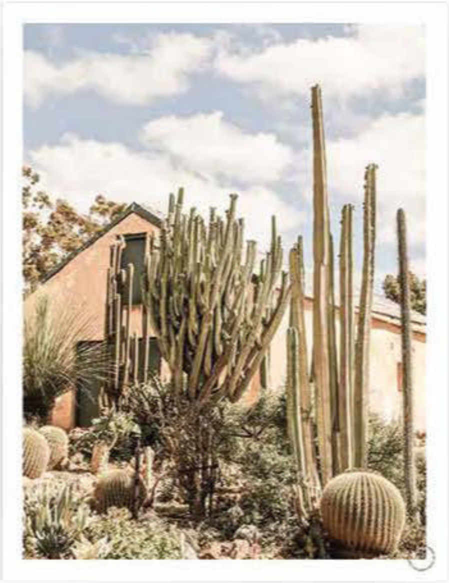

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7

1. **SHOT BY CLINT Karoo-Garden Art Print** *R995, Esque* 2. **Anne Hanging Basket (Set of 2)** *R450, MØN Exteriors* 3. **Cabbage Coffee Cup & Saucer** *R550, Vida Bela* 4. **Double-Walled Aqua Glass Mugs** *R125 each, The Home Quarter* 5. **Sugar & Vice Large Confidence Mug** *R279 each, Superbalist* 6. **Sixth Floor Brass Sitting Bird Bottle Opener** *R449, Superbalist* 7. **The Hers Mug (Set of 4)** *R450, KNUS* 8. **Farm Quintessentials Farm Favourites Gift Box** *R1 700, Babylonstoren*

9

This reversible colour cotton throw is designed by young South African designer Deone Rabe. It's a functional piece of art with which to snuggle up on the couch, drape over a bed or use as a lap blanket in your workspace.

10

All Infiniti Fires wood stoves have a full vermiculite jacket inside. This insulating material raises the combustion temperature inside the stove to more than 950°C. At these temperatures, the wood burns highly efficiently and sends about 70% of the heat from the fire out through the door glass as an infrared light wave. This enables the heat to travel very quickly and is brilliant at heating open-plan living spaces. The easy-to-use air controls enable the user to adjust heat output to that required. At high setting, the stove will produce lots of heat to quickly lift the temperature of the room. At low settings, the stoves are capable of burning for up to 12 hours on one load of wood, enabling them to keep homes warm with minimal effort and wood consumption. For more information, visit ***www.infinitifires.co.za***.

11

9. Something Good Twists & Turns Young Designer Throw 130 cm = 190 cm *R2 649, Yuppiechef* **10. Atlantic Wall Hanging Basket (Set of 3)** *R320, MØN Exteriors* **11. Latifa 3-ply 4 kg Mink Blanket** *R1 199, Homechoice*

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TRENDSCAPES

2023 is brimming with diverse inspiration for interior design professionals and enthusiasts alike. From biophilic design to the rebirth of bespoke; here are some of the trends you might like to explore in your space

Aidan Hart, the creative director at the interior architecture firm Inhouse, shares his insight into the trends at the top of their hot list – those they're leaning into right now and how they choose to work within the trendscape without compromising on their integrity.

'The concept of cocooning was coined in the '90s and in 2020–2021 we saw it rise to heights we'd never seen before. Now that we are emerging into a new reality, it's clear that clients are wanting to invest more in their spaces than ever before – a focus on quality is paramount and carefully curated homes are increasingly relevant to people who view the world through more of an art-directed lens,' says Aidan.

Biophilic Design

Without a doubt, a return to natural tones, textures and nature-inspired elements is an enormous trend, the visual connection to nature is easy on the eye and promotes a sense of ease and wellness. In South Africa it is particularly relevant, given our extraordinary natural environment. 'We are increasingly using plants as elements in spaces, designing custom planters and using plant installations as screens in between different living spaces. We even have a living Ficus screen in our studio space,' says Aidan. Biophilic design elements also extend to natural materials like timber as well as beautiful organic shapes in furniture and particularly the use of natural fibres as a tactile element.

Luxury Finishes & Fittings

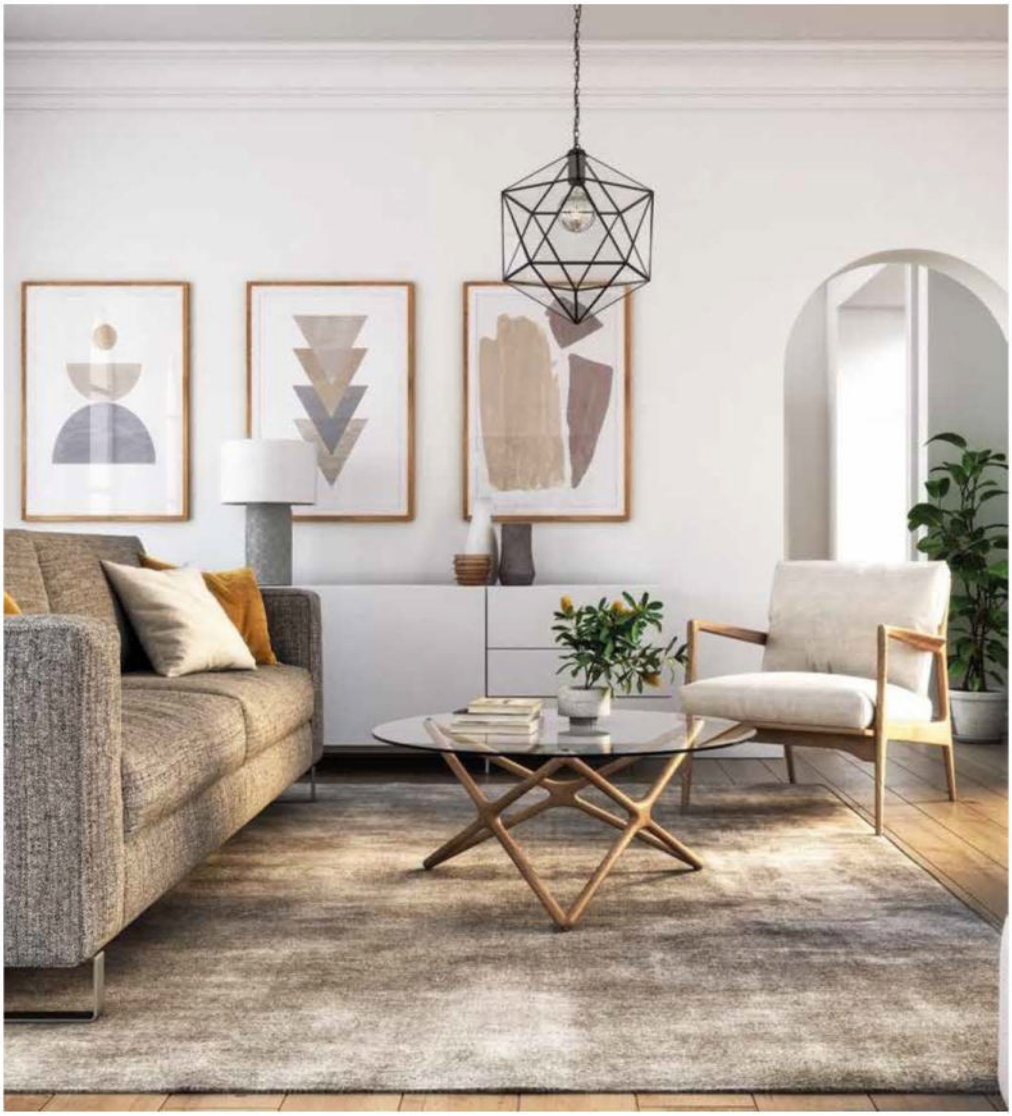
A desire for better quality and craftsmanship shows no signs of slowing down – especially for clients wanting a unique edge to their interiors. This extends to sourcing exclusive materials, exotic hardwoods, luxury fabrics and one-of-a-kind stone elements, which are then incorporated as focal points into clients' homes. 'Our little black book of trusted suppliers, artisans and crafters has never been busier and we work closely with them to hone each unique design.'

Made to Order

'Every homeowner is looking for a point of difference where their personality and preferences can shine – and our team of designers know exactly how to transform any space into a showpiece using made-to-measure and custom elements. It's our reason for being,' explains Aidan. Customised furniture items that work to the scale of a room are a good example, so are hand-tufted wool rugs that work with the prevalent colour scheme. 'We work with trusted artisans to make custom furniture. Lighting is its own design language and we are no strangers to sourcing artwork that speaks to the interior. Sometimes, we use the client's art collection as a starting point and work from there.'

Sustainable & Efficient

Like their clients, Inhouse recognises the importance of energy and space-efficient home and office environments. 'We are mindful of creating spaces that work for the people who operate within them and that are mindful of conscious design principles. This means sourcing recycled and sustainable materials where we can, incorporating energy-efficient elements like lighting and appropriate insulation into spaces, sourcing from local suppliers and first rethinking existing structures or features rather than going straight to "new first".'



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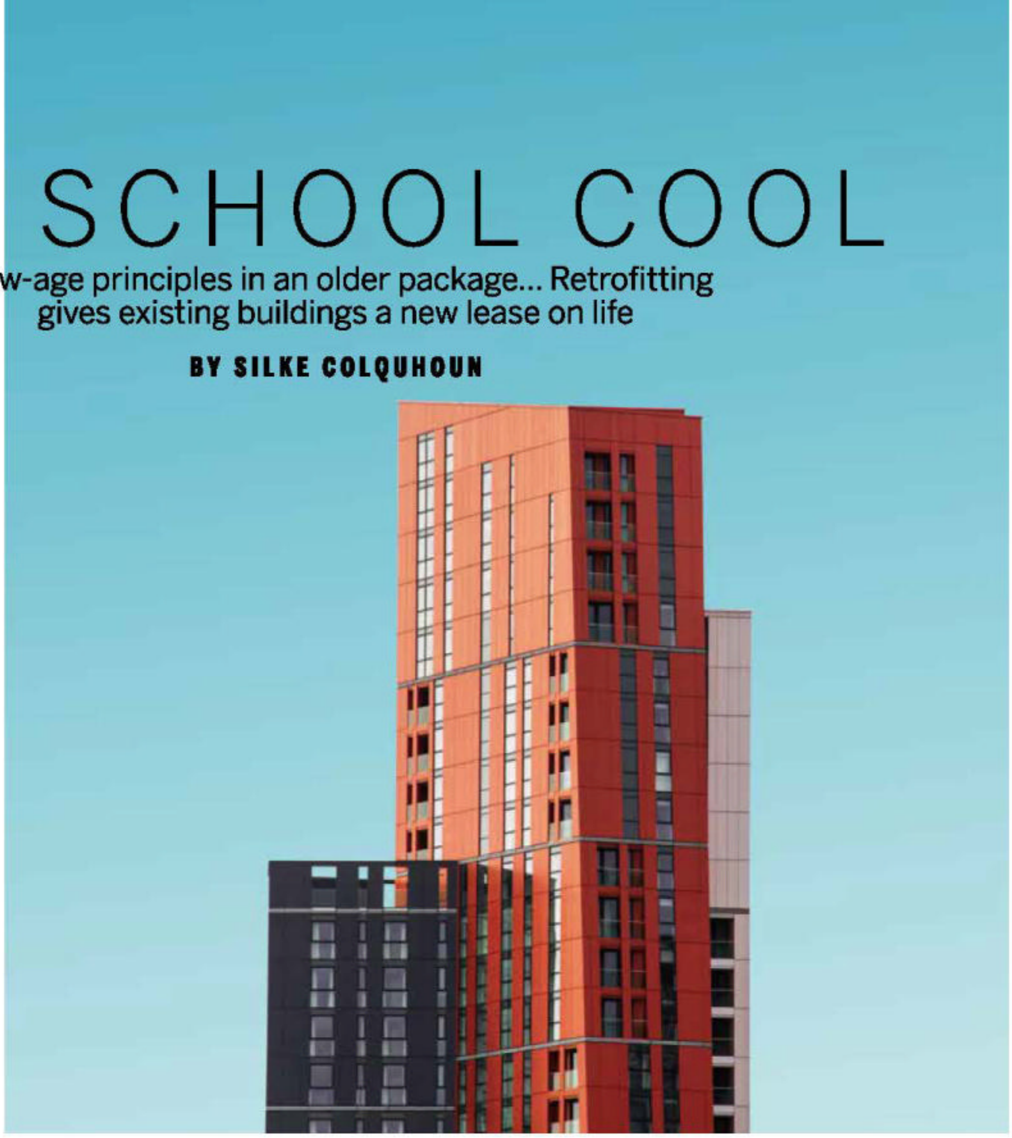
Smart Spaces

'Inhouse is proud of its pioneering spirit regarding the use of smart technology in making workspace design decisions; our custom "Ergosense system" of smart monitors enables us to design efficient office environments that are adaptable, allowing users to manage everything from lighting to temperature and air quality,' says Aidan. In domestic environments, smart technology has been part of the Inhouse design language for some time. Clients appreciate smart lighting solutions, the ability to access their homes offsite, voice and motion-activated features and integrated smart appliances. Clients are more keyed into design than ever before and bring some of their own ideas and discoveries to the table. 'Our job is to hone these, amplify their preferences and tap into our expertise to source and commission appropriate complementary finishes, fittings and details that together fulfil the client's expectations.'

OLD SCHOOL COOL

New-age principles in an older package… Retrofitting gives existing buildings a new lease on life

BY SILKE COLQUHOUN



In the shadow of stylish new green buildings, proudly basking in the limelight, are masses of older, tired and not-so-smart buildings. These are the unfashionable high-rises, a bit grimy and unloved; the neglected office buildings and those that have managed to retain their good looks and now hide their shortcomings within their brick walls.

'About 99% of buildings in South Africa are most likely very inefficient and not green,' says Manfred Braune, chief technical officer at the Green Building Council South Africa (GBCSA). 'There is thus a huge opportunity and need for existing buildings to become more energy efficient and green, whether residential or non-residential. The demand for green buildings has mostly been in the office sector.'

Green retrofitting – the refurbishing of the existing building stock with green principles particularly regarding improved energy efficiency – is gaining momentum in SA. By 'recycling' an old building instead of demolishing it, you save on resources such as construction materials as well as embodied energy and water that would have gone into building new from scratch. This also makes it easier to preserve the heritage of the original structure.

The GBCSA has developed a Green Star Existing Building Performance rating tool, which targets the whole building and reviews 12 months of operational data from an occupied building.

Alison Groves, regional director of building services at WSP Africa, says: 'Our focus at WSP has been primarily on designing new buildings with Green Star certifications, but recently we have started to also take on projects aimed at improving the sustainability of existing buildings.'

There are hundreds of thousands of non-residential buildings and several million residential buildings in SA – but according to Manfred, they don't have to meet any minimum energy efficiency or green building requirements. 'Because the regulations were only promulgated for new buildings in 2011, all buildings constructed or renovated before this date could have been built as inefficiently or efficiently as the designers and owner liked,' he says.

The SANS 10400 Part XA minimum energy efficiency regulations, therefore, apply only to new buildings or major retrofits that have to undergo a council approval process. He calls for urgent legislation of existing buildings in order to steer the country towards meeting the national greenhouse gas emissions reductions targets (42% below the 'business-as-usual' emissions by 2025).

Another hurdle is the lack of reliable data. There is no accurate centralised record of how many buildings exist in SA, what condition they are in and how many are being retrofitted, says Manfred.

Individual organisations are keeping records for their own purposes, such as the GBCSA, whose database contains all the green building projects that have been certified through the council since its inception in 2007. However, while the number of certifications has grown exponentially and is on an upward trajectory, the GBCSA has issued just more than 400 green building certifications to date, which – according to its chief technical office – is 'a drop in the ocean'.

However, progress is being made. The 11th GBCSA Convention ('the Road to Zero') marked a milestone for green building in SA when the

Department of Public Works officially launched its green building policy. The aim is 'to provide leadership in the sustainable building sector; efficient energy, water and waste management, indoor environmental quality and comfort, ensuring sustainable product and materials management'. Much of this will mean the retrofitting of existing buildings.

The business case for retrofitting has been well documented. 'If specified and installed correctly, systems and structures can produce a sustainable return on investment [ROI] that can amount to between 20% and 70% of energy and gain revenue through this investment,' says Alison.

Every project requires a cost-benefit and life cycle-costing exercise, but a rule of thumb says that lighting retrofits have a typical payback period of one to two years, while air-conditioning retrofits could take between two and 10 years.

The capital outlay and expected payback depend entirely on the extent of the refurbishment. Manfred poses the question, as an example, of whether to retrofit an inefficient facade, or keep the facade intact and deal only with internal services. He prefers to talk about 'deep' retrofit instead of using the term 'state-of-the-art', which typically implies it will be expensive or require highly qualified facilities management to manage the building.

'The journey towards a deep retrofit includes a mix of passive and active design, and considers everything from the facade, roofing, shading, lighting, air-conditioning, plug loads, building management systems, behaviour change and so on,' he says.

The way to start any retrofit project is with an energy and water audit to measure and benchmark usage before reducing it. Here the GBCSA Energy Water Performance tool comes in useful for benchmarking office buildings against industry norms.

In the 2018 financial year, JSE-listed Redefine Properties reported it had installed about 2 300 smart electricity meters in 73 of its buildings, as well as smart water metering and control devices in 66 buildings. 'Using smart metering data enables us to operate buildings efficiently and increases consumption control to minimise energy and water use,' the company was quoted in *Engineering News*. 'Additionally, we have installed backup water solutions at a number of key properties in Cape Town. This R40-million investment reduces our consumption of potable water by 800 000 litres per day.'

PHOTOS: UNSPLASH

Redefine currently had 30 office buildings registered for existing building performance certifications, that were to be completed in FY2019.

GBCSA founding member Growthpoint Properties owns a large number of 4-star rated existing office buildings, which account for a good total of gross leasable area for the office portfolio. The company is also involved in piloting a new Green Star certification tool for existing industrial building performance.

'Attaining additional green certification or re-certification of our buildings remains on the agenda, as does the continual investigation of renewable energy sources such as solar,' said Estienne de Klerk, CEO of Growthpoint South Africa in the company's 2018 environmental, social and governance report.

'We have spent more than R163 million on solar plant installations that produced 11.9 GWh of power in one year alone, and reduced carbon emissions by 11 346 tons. In addressing the water crisis in the Western Cape, we have invested R34 million in water-saving initiatives in the year under review,' he wrote.

Renewable energy is key to enhancing the energy mix for the buildings, and more solar installations will be completed in years to come to add a further 16 GWh per year, according to the report. Growthpoint is also 'actively working on making our shopping centres more efficient'.

Vukile Property Fund has done just that and retrofitted solar installations on the roof of its shopping centres, including Meadowdale Mall in Germiston and East Rand Mall (co-owned with Redefine).

Meanwhile, Attacq and Atterbury, co-owners of the Mall of Africa in Waterfall City, Johannesburg, are installing the largest solar PV rooftop system in the southern hemisphere (4 755 kW on 45 000 m^2) on top of their mall. This is expected to create CO_2 and coal savings that translate into 157 fewer coal delivery trucks on the road per year.

In retrofitting, more attention is being paid to roof and facade spaces – not only for renewable energy but also as a 'heat island' to cool down temperatures in urban Africa. A British innovation, Evaporos, suggests that 3D-printed porous insulation panels are wrapped around building facades. The flexible panels can be closed during the heat of the day and opened at night, reducing energy consumption for cooling and ventilation.

New green buildings increasingly feature roof and vertical gardens, which can also be retrofitted. In fact, the Public Works Green Building Policy mentions the establishment of roof gardens. A report on Arup's Cities Alive investigates how vegetation on roofs and facades serves as a 'living envelope'. The benefits include better air quality, heat absorption and stormwater management, as well as habitat creation and improved human wellness.

The thing about retrofitting is that there's scope for bold, imaginative solutions. 'A tired old office block does not need to remain an office block. It could undergo a deep retrofit and emerge as residential apartments,' says Alison.

This also applies to new, smart green buildings and the public spaces between them, but especially to the masses of old and sick buildings waiting for a new lease on life.

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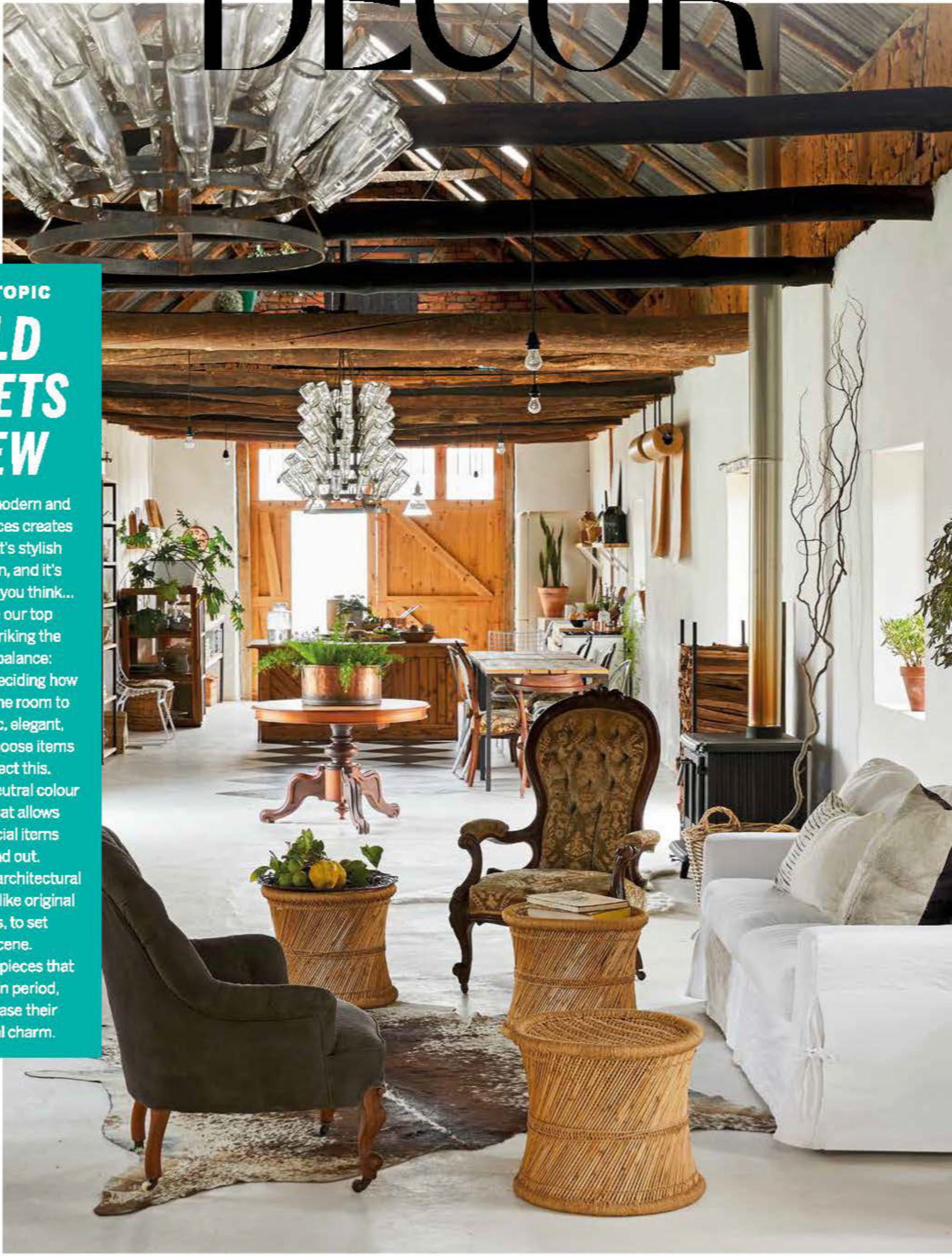


HOT TOPIC

OLD MEETS NEW

Blending modern and vintage pieces creates a look that's stylish yet lived-in, and it's easier than you think… Here are our top tips for striking the perfect balance:

- Start by deciding how you want the room to feel (rustic, elegant, etc.) and choose items that reflect this.
- Go for a neutral colour palette that allows your special items to stand out.
- Maximise architectural backdrops, like original features, to set the scene.
- Combine pieces that contrast in period, to showcase their individual charm.

STYLING: SVEN ALBERDING; PHOTO: WARREN HEATH/BUREAUX

SOUL SPACES

10 of the best inviting interiors

The concept of cocooning has never felt more relevant and increasingly we're turning inwards and bringing added heart into our spaces – making them more comfortable and welcoming than ever before

BY VICKI SLEET

Tip

Decorating with multiple layers of wood requires confidence and balance – here, the use of naïve hand-woven chairs in a lighter tone brings unrefined artistry to the space – that, and the proliferation of succulents, uncomplicated glass and terracotta containers.

NATURE'S CHOICE

Styles, shapes and preferred tones may come and come go but the perennial wonder of wood remains a constant. In this space, reclaimed timbers, upcycled furniture finds and the natural grains of hand-woven chairs are an enticing and intriguing combination.

Design Notes

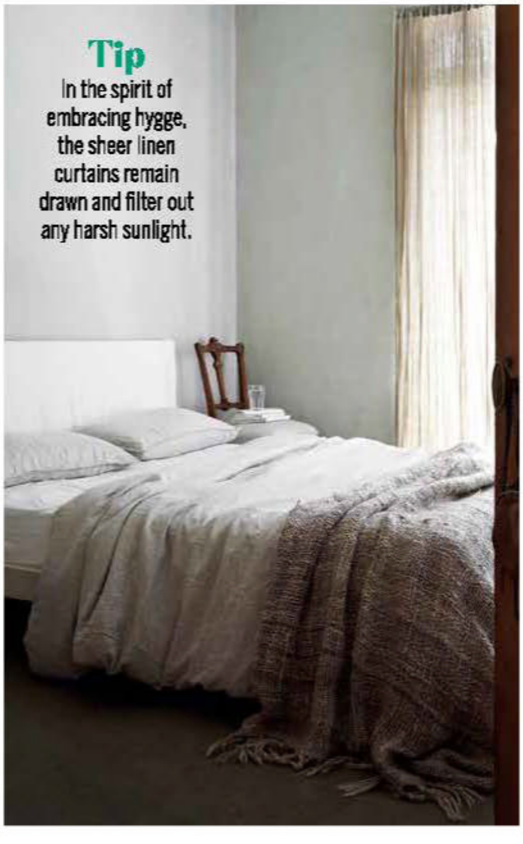
- There's no doubt about it, wood brings warmth to any decor scenario and in the case of this renovated Victorian home, this notion certainly rings true.
- The original doors and architraves were stripped of centuries of paint and sanded right down to reveal their natural woodgrain and patterning.
- The table deliberately embraces a hand-hewn personality – embodying the respect given to craftsmanship and the beauty of natural timber.

BEDROOM BLISS

This bedroom embraces a host of subdued tones and tactile natural textures – including slubby hemp, sheer linen and the softest cotton. The effect is ascetic in its simplicity but infinitely inviting and restful. There is an undeniable sense of hygge that is so humble, with the few carefully chosen pieces commanding quiet respect.

Design Notes

- The colour palette in this pared-down space is equally spare – while the chunky woven throw adds a delightful layer of texture.
- This bedroom is all about minimalism yet is definitely not austere. The whisper of grey in the wall colour and the warmth of the wood adds a rustic and easy-on-the-eye appeal.



Tip

In the spirit of embracing hygge, the sheer linen curtains remain drawn and filter out any harsh sunlight.

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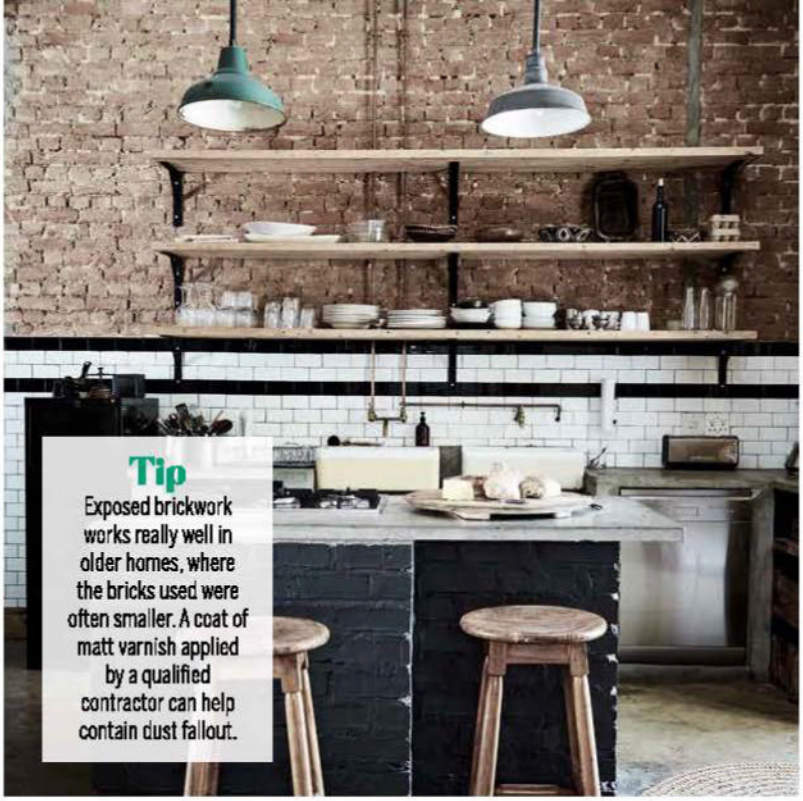


Tip

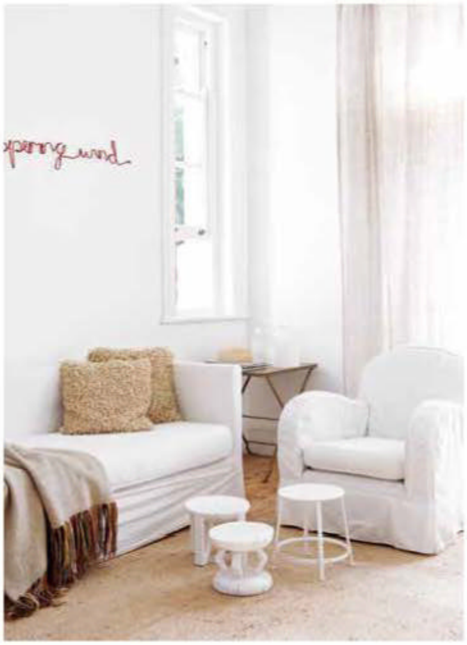
Exposed brickwork works really well in older homes, where the bricks used were often smaller. A coat of matt varnish applied by a qualified contractor can help contain dust fallout.

ROUGH LUXE LOVE

Textures do all the talking in this eye-catching kitchen, where smooth metro tiles are in stark contrast to the exposed brick walls and the painted brick of the central island. Industrial lights and shelving units are the final touches.

Design Notes

- Sleek black details seen in the stripe of black tiles and shelving brackets take the aesthetics up a notch in this kitchen.
- The rawness of this space is tempered by the introduction of warmer tones thanks to the duo of wooden stools and the hand-woven rug.
- The unrefined appearance and irregularity of the raw bricks are exactly what give this renovated period home its rich character and aesthetic appeal.

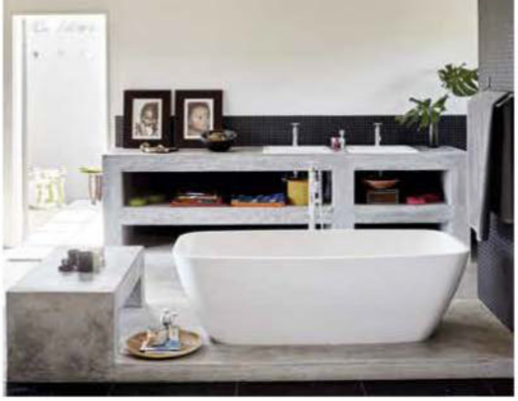


ALL WHITE NOW

An all-white colour palette brings a timeless sense of serenity to any space.

Design Notes

- Natural fibres in the rugs underfoot, on the sofa cushions and the soft woven blanket break up the all-white scene and bring tactile pleasure to this living room.
- The crisp white tone brings a fresh flavour to the interior. For a sun-splashed space, a cooler white is best while a warmer shade is best for rooms that don't see as much light.
- A splash of colour (Heath Nash wirework) breaks up the blank canvas and brings in a quirky focal point.

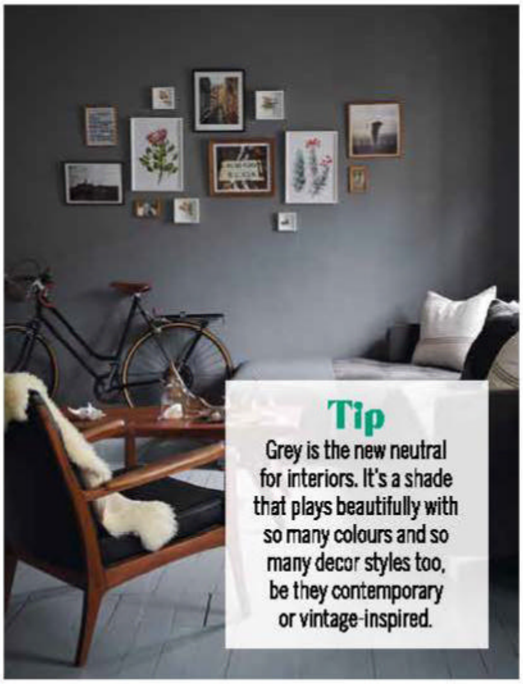


STONE WORKS

Polished cement is a texture that perfectly suits spaces that embrace modernism and minimalism.

Design Notes

- High-shine cement gives subtle sophistication to this spacious bathroom, while the integrated countertops add a highly practical edge.
- Hand-woven fabrics add pops of colour and break up the mostly monochromatic scheme.
- The quartz bath is a luxe touch – and together with the built-in polished cement bench forms a key focal point in this modern oasis of calm.



Tip

Grey is the new neutral for interiors. It's a shade that plays beautifully with so many colours and so many decor styles too, be they contemporary or vintage-inspired.

GREY MATTERS

The liberal use of grey gives this urban space a dose of sophistication.

Design Notes

- This room painted in white would look completely different! The mid-grey painted wall creates a sense of drama without being overwhelming.
- The different tones of grey come together to create a cocoon-like effect. The floor's pale grey is ideal – ensuring the contrast in tones isn't too stark.

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Tip

Integrated seating and under-counter shelving ensure clutter can be kept under control, while the wood-burning oven makes this space a comfortable and cosy spot to retreat to.

CREATIVE SPACE

Some say creativity is what will heal the world – which means carving out a space for inspiration is going to become more and more important. Be it a corner of a room, a dedicated studio space with a door, or a garden shed, let flexing your creative muscles be a priority.

Design Notes

- Creativity can sometimes veer into chaos and disarray – the toned-down palette of white and wood in this comfortable space creates a sense of aesthetic order.
- The trolley of art supplies is a practical essential but can be wheeled out of the way if need be.
- The screed cement floor is an unpretentious and practical touch.

COLLECTABLES CONVERSATION

The owner of this urban loft is a seasoned traveller with a keen eye for unusual finds. Her penchant for displaying her favourite treasures is revealed on her laden picture shelves.

Design Notes

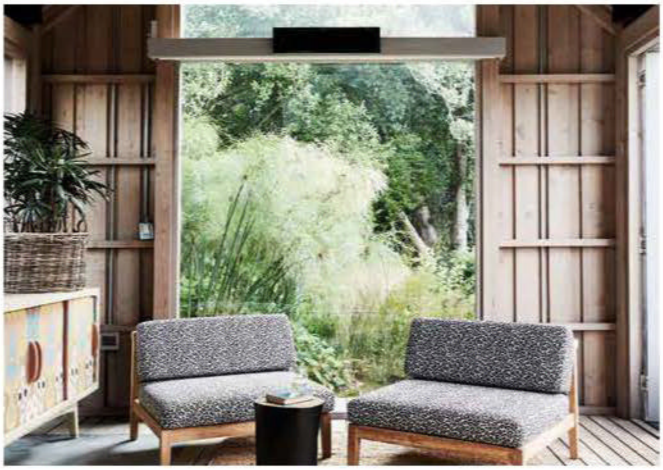
- Low-slung furniture ensures this living room does not become too visually cluttered.
- By not mounting framed images onto the walls and using picture shelves instead, the owner can indulge in her love of changing displays – it also means more images can be showcased.

GREEN & PLEASANT

Not since the seventies have houseplants been so big! And why not? Studies show caring for plants can be as rewarding as loving a pet – they're relatively easy to maintain, act as living decor and purify the air that surrounds us.

Design Notes

- This alfresco bedroom is all about bringing the outside in! A flowering and well-pruned tree is a sculptural anchor in this eclectic space while the suspended swinging bench brings a touch of outdoor whimsy undercover.
- A previously unloved courtyard is transformed into a hardworking kitchen garden and inside-outside garden installation. Open to the elements, it receives its due of sunlight and rain but is easily accessible as a delightful container and vertical garden that really delivers.



LET THE OUTSIDE IN

This stylised outdoor pool pavilion communes with nature in a dramatic fashion. An oversized window lets in the lush garden views while the chic seats encourage you to take respite.

Design Notes

- This pavilion is constructed entirely of wood and offers a space to reflect, take a breath and marvel at the beauty of nature.
- Natural unfinished timber and hand-hewn textures extend the notion of communing with nature – in infinite style.
- The garden design here is as important as the interior design – layers of textured plants and soothing hues of green create beautifully framed images looking from the indoors out.

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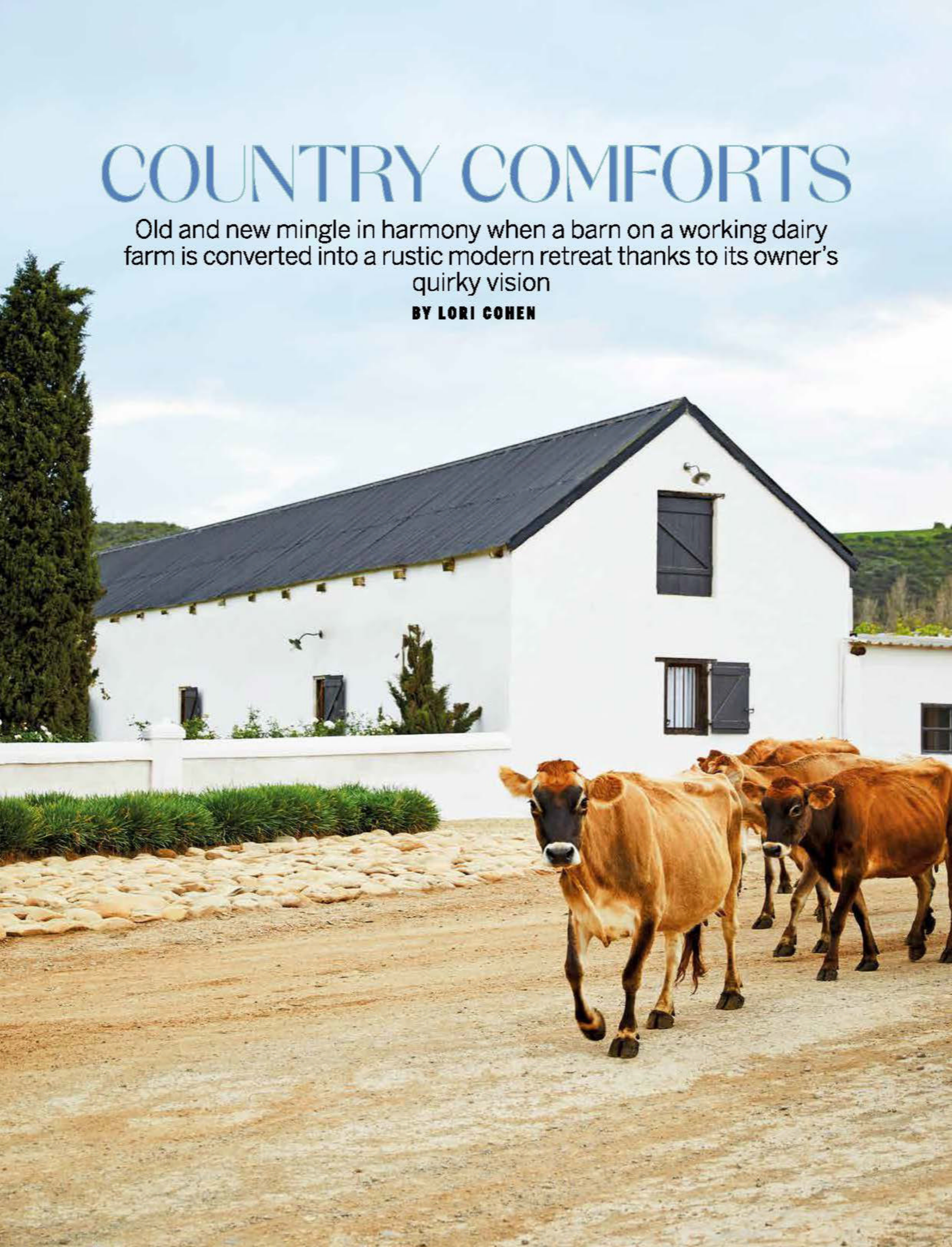
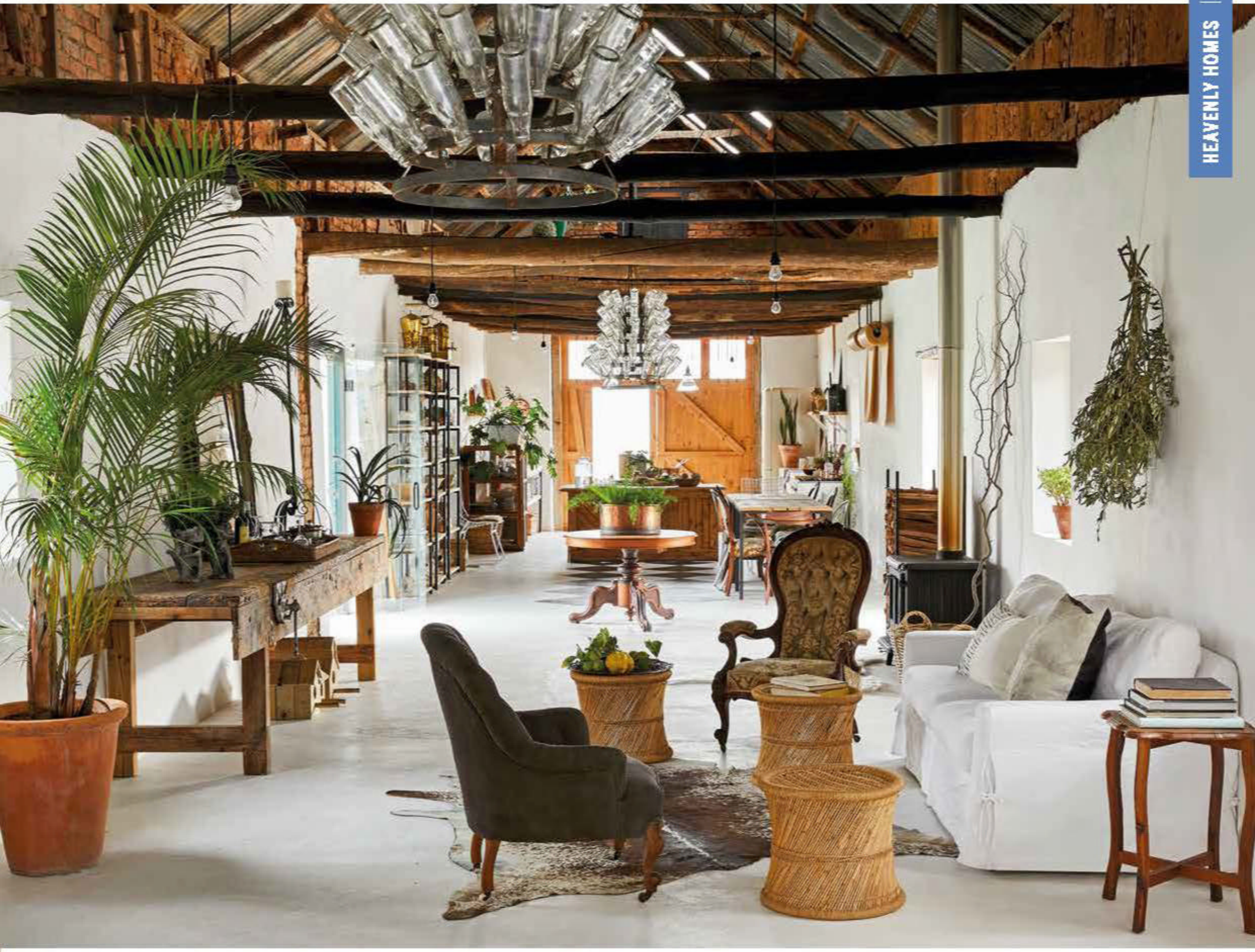
COUNTRY COMFORTS

Old and new mingle in harmony when a barn on a working dairy farm is converted into a rustic modern retreat thanks to its owner's quirky vision

BY LORI COHEN





A 170-year-old barn proved too much of a temptation for Illze Muller to ignore. The 1 450 square foot shed was in a state of inertia on the working dairy farm she shares with her husband Wouter and three children. Illze's vision for Langskuur (Afrikaans for 'long barn'), conceived for visiting family and guests, was to retain the original footprint, roof space and feel of the barn, embracing it as a loft-like space, with different living zones mapped throughout. 'I didn't want to change any of the features or proportions of the structure if we could help it,' says Illze. 'So we started from a place of working with what we had.' However, to compensate for the consequential poor natural light in the barn, she shrewdly installed two new

A Stylish Mix

A spontaneous seating area separates the dining and kitchen areas from the sleeping quarters. A modern couch mingles with heirloom, occasional chairs and more rustic items Illze chose to provide a layer of texture.

Sofa: Wetherleys; **Occasional chairs:** heirlooms; **Cane stools:** Bali Trading; **Nguni cow rug:** Weylandts; **Workshop bench:** found on friend's farm; **Bottle dryer chandeliers:** designed by Illze and made by Hannes

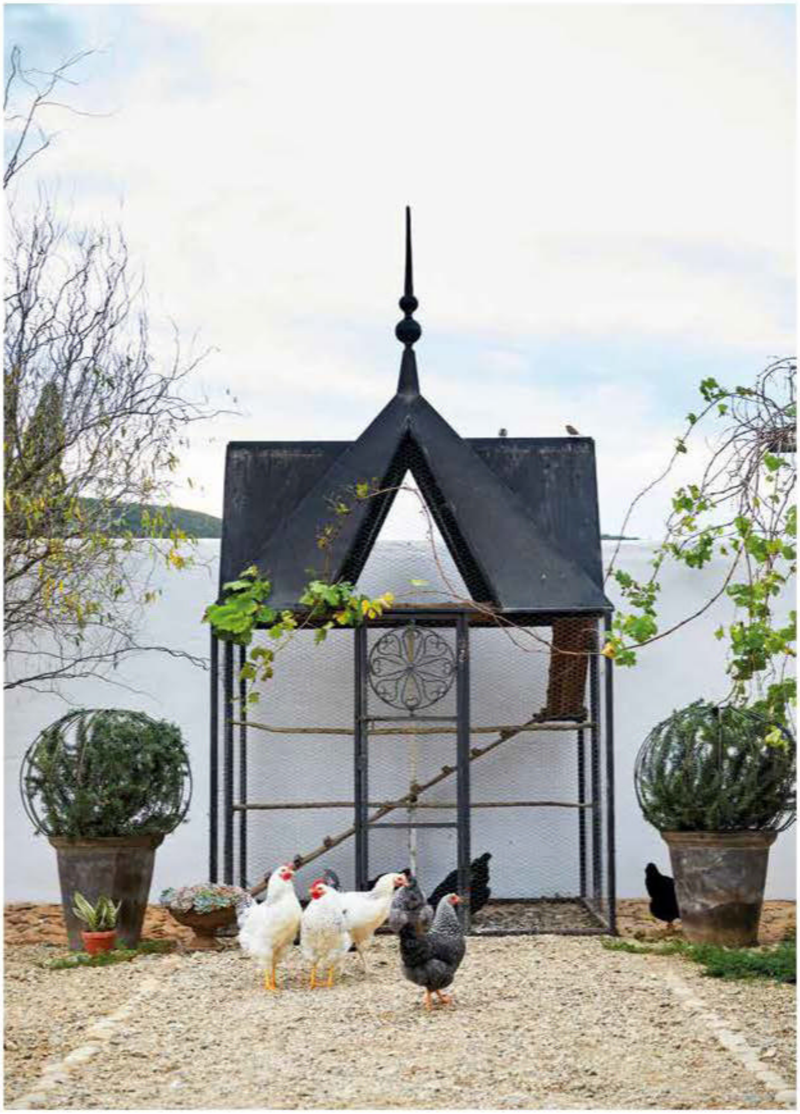
glass doors, simultaneously illuminating the space, flooding it with pastoral views and giving it a contemporary flair.

The farm, home to Friesland and Jersey cattle, is nestled in a countrified corner of the Western Cape, a couple of hours' drive from Cape Town. Illze, a vintage hunter, collector of curiosities and design lover, harnessed the metal and woodwork skills of local Hannes Oosthuizen to patch together the windows, floors and walls using salvaged wood and iron.

Throughout the project, she also called on Hannes to craft numerous items based on designs she dreamed up. From an ornate chicken coop in the courtyard to bottle dryer-inspired chandeliers, it's these details that give the project its authenticity and quirk. 'I enjoy the collaborative process. I come up with the ideas and guide Hannes as he makes them. It's very rewarding for both of us,' says Illze.

Having removed the ceiling to expose the roof and wooden beams, and painted the concrete floor white, the next step was carving up the living space. Illze chose to embrace the achingly authentic barn door on one end, allocating the adjacent space to a simple, rustic kitchen.

> “
> *It's the details that give the project its authenticity and quirk*



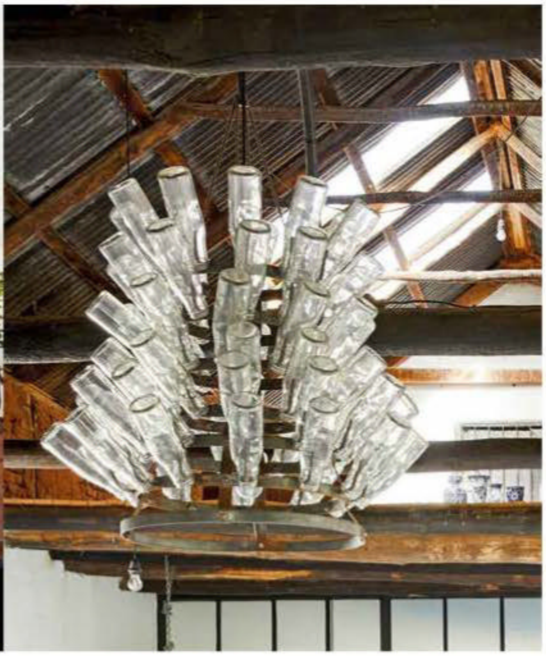
Egg-cellent Quarters

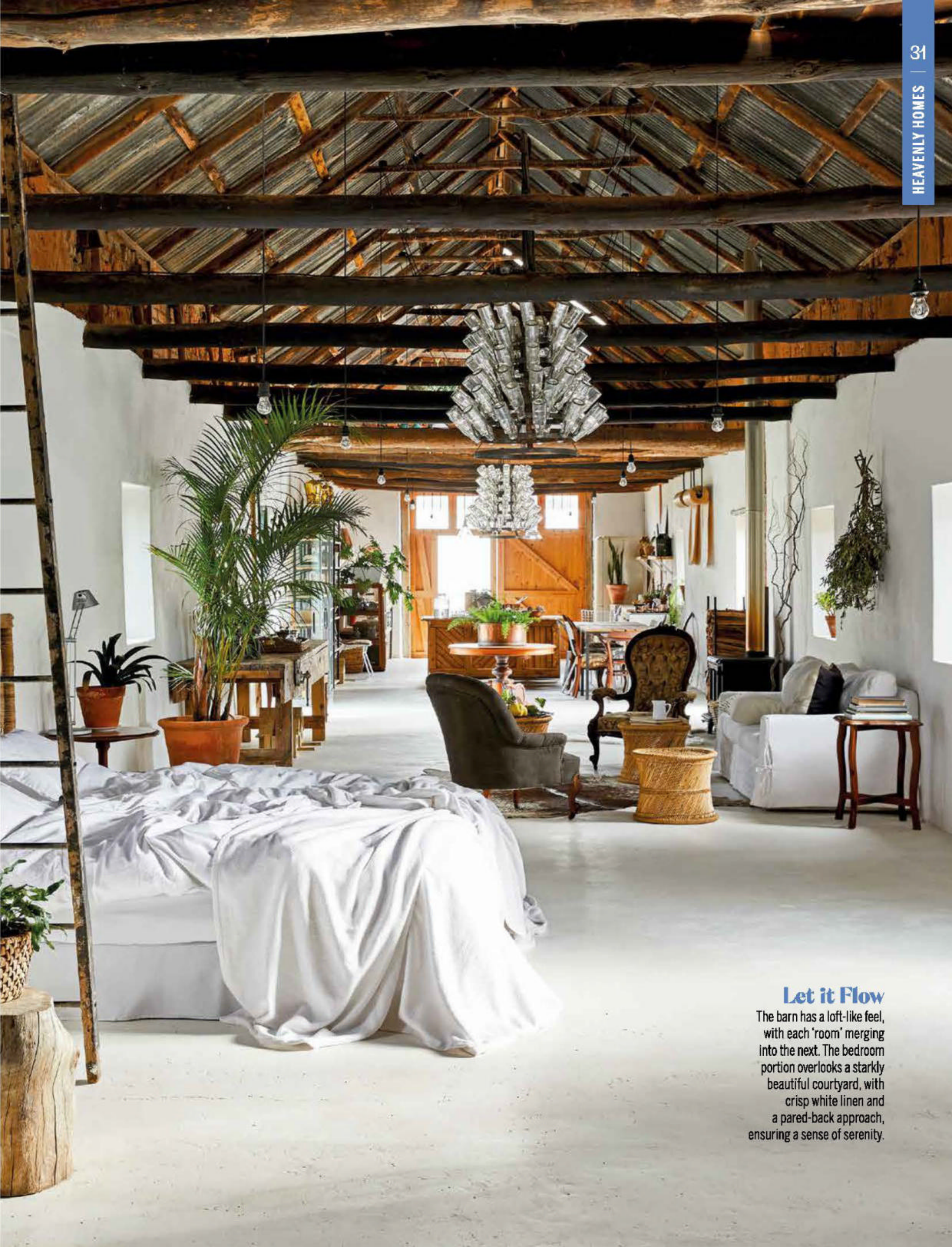
Langskuur is designated for guests, but long-term tenants, and producers of the family's egg supply, live in a quirky **coop** designed by Illze and made by Hannes.

Hint of Nostalgia

Personal touches are apparent to everyone in this accommodation dreamed into existence by Illze.

Birdcage: Builders Home; **Shop storage counter:** from Illze's father's original country store





Let it Flow

The barn has a loft-like feel, with each 'room' merging into the next. The bedroom portion overlooks a starkly beautiful courtyard, with crisp white linen and a pared-back approach, ensuring a sense of serenity.

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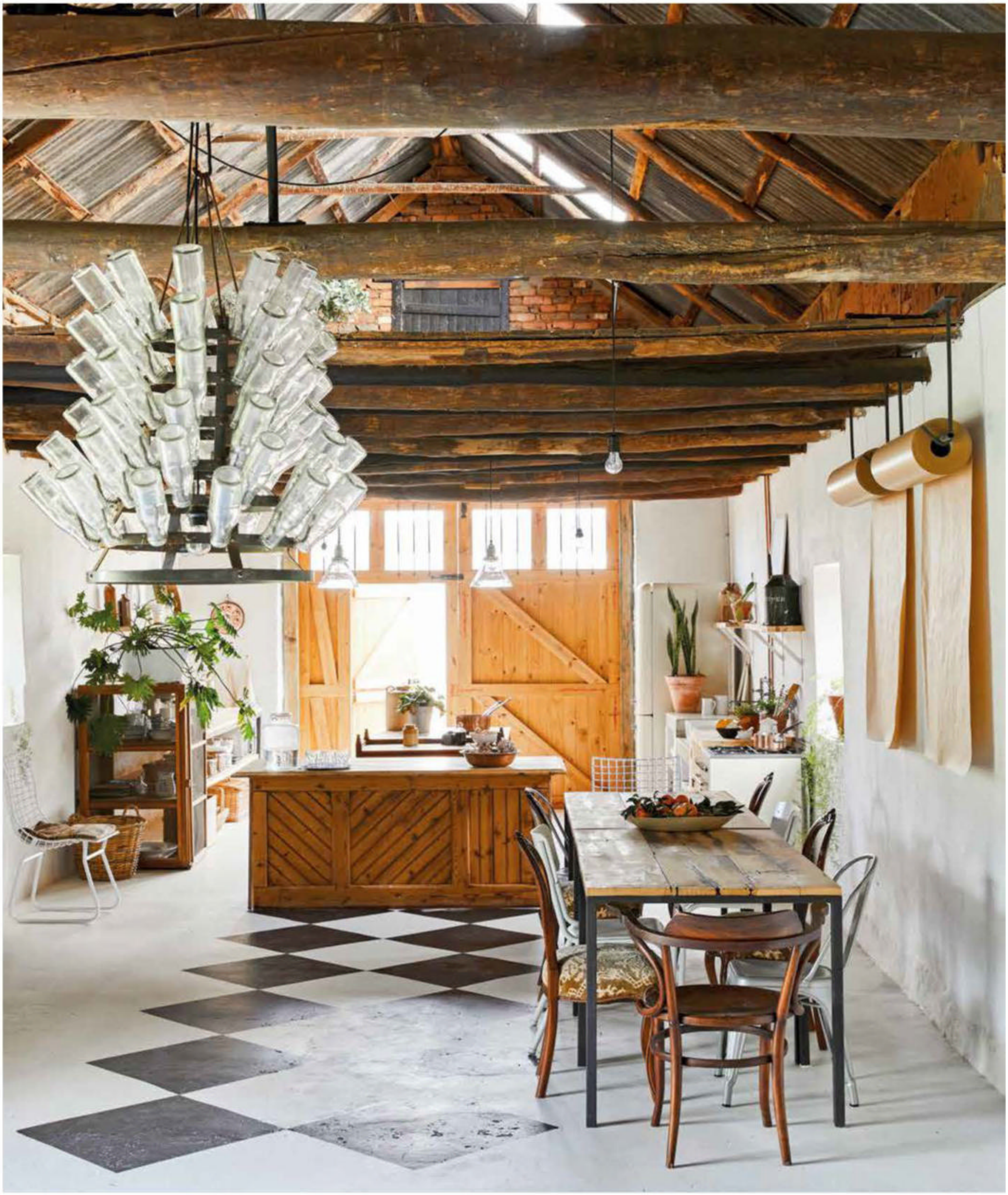

Traditional Charm

The open-plan kitchen retains its traditional charm thanks to the modern but vintage-inspired fridge and gas stove. Fitted with shelving and cupboards made from reclaimed wood and counters fashioned out of roughly cast concrete, it has a casual and inviting feel. A whimsical 'bottle dryer' chandelier enlivens the space.

Chandelier paper rolls: designed by Illze and made by Hannes; **Upholstered dining chair:** heirloom; **White wire chairs:** Arabesque; **Other chairs:** heirlooms; **Deli tables:** designed by Illze and made by Hannes from reclaimed yellowwood floorboards; **Meat safe:** heirloom; **Glass pendant lights:** Builders Home

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Turning Tables

'A lot of the things I used in the barn, I had already,' says Illze. The kitchen island counter was from her father's country store, while an unused table extension from the main farmhouse is used as an additional workspace.

Industrial Chic

Illze's choice for fixtures is to leave the pipes exposed and embrace their industrial look. 'I like their simplicity, and they're so practical.'

Basins: CTM; **Artwork:** by daughter Anet; **Bowls:** Wonki Ware; **Stove:** Kloppers

With the door flung open in the morning, the generous dwelling embraces the sights and sounds of farm life. In the kitchen, the wood for the cabinets came from old scaffolding, and the crockery is ingeniously stored and displayed in a salvaged vintage meat safe.

She also gave the kitchen/dining area a unique stamp to define it from the rest of the open-plan expanse. Illze hand-painted black squares on the concrete floor – a simple but effective nod to traditional farmhouse detailing. Similarly, expanses of natural paper rolls hang from the wall, giving it the feel of a deli.

Many furniture pieces were sourced from the Muller farm, dating back five generations – and Illze's family heirlooms. A cacophony of chairs from various eras huddle around the dining table, alongside shelves sporting fossils, threadbare books and other new and old finds that have taken Illze's fancy.

Confidently claiming the centre of the barn is the cosy and gently eccentric sitting area, which subtly separates the 'bedroom' and en-suite bathroom. Twin mezzanines that bookended the barn were also retained. Here, underneath one, a sweep of doors in steel and frosted glass separates the bathroom and sleeping zone. Along with the sumptuous bed and cane-hanging seat, it feels like a cocooned retreat, inhabiting the otherwise vast expanse of the barn.

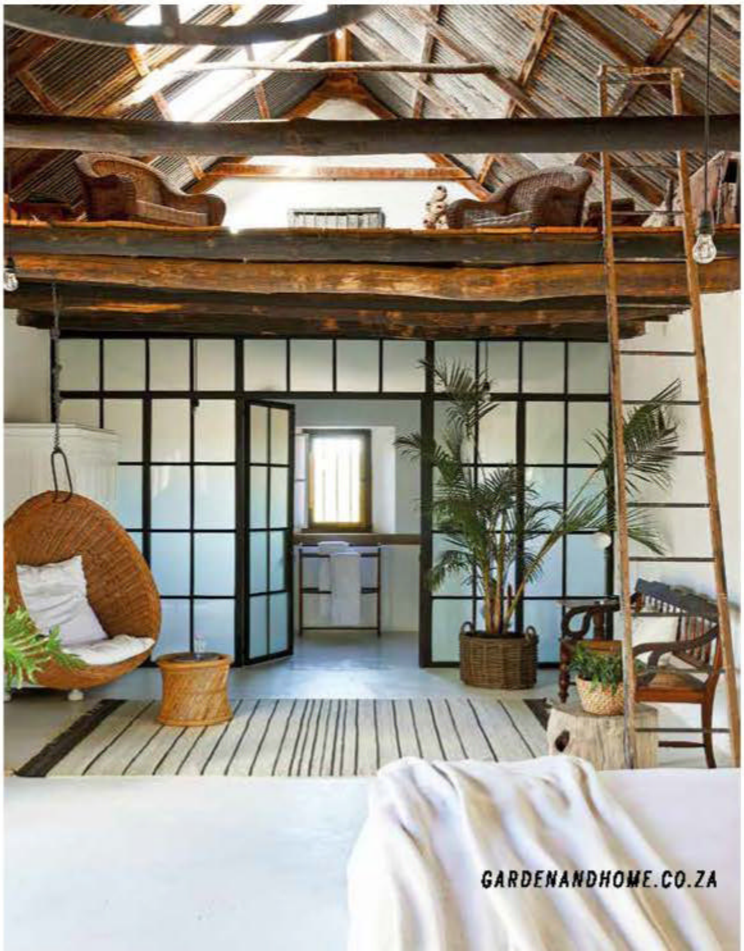
Illze also ploughed her energy into transforming the farm's original milking shed into an additional suite. It connects to the barn through a courtyard confined by stark white walls containing an existing water trough upgraded into a water feature and the bespoke fairytale chicken coop. The 'cottage' bathroom reflects the shed's heritage – the basins mimic feeding troughs, and the exposed bathroom pipes and fittings are timelessly appropriate.

Gifted with an empty shell, Illze has filled the void with pieces infused with memories. In the kitchen, a basket her grandmother used to collect flowers from her garden; elsewhere, a storage unit used to display grain in her father's country store. Combined with her eye for uplifting contemporary pieces and a natural impulse to create, this off-the-beaten-track farm retreat beautifully balances the then and now.

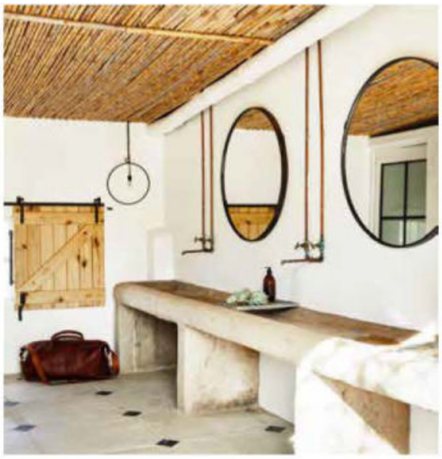
> “
> *Illze has filled the void with pieces infused with memories*

Smart Storage ↓

A mezzanine storage area looks down onto the bedroom and serves as a lofty retreat and reading space. Illze repurposed a farm ladder to create a utilitarian staircase to access the mezzanine. 'In winter, the mezzanines are particularly warm – they're a great place to relax,' says Illze.



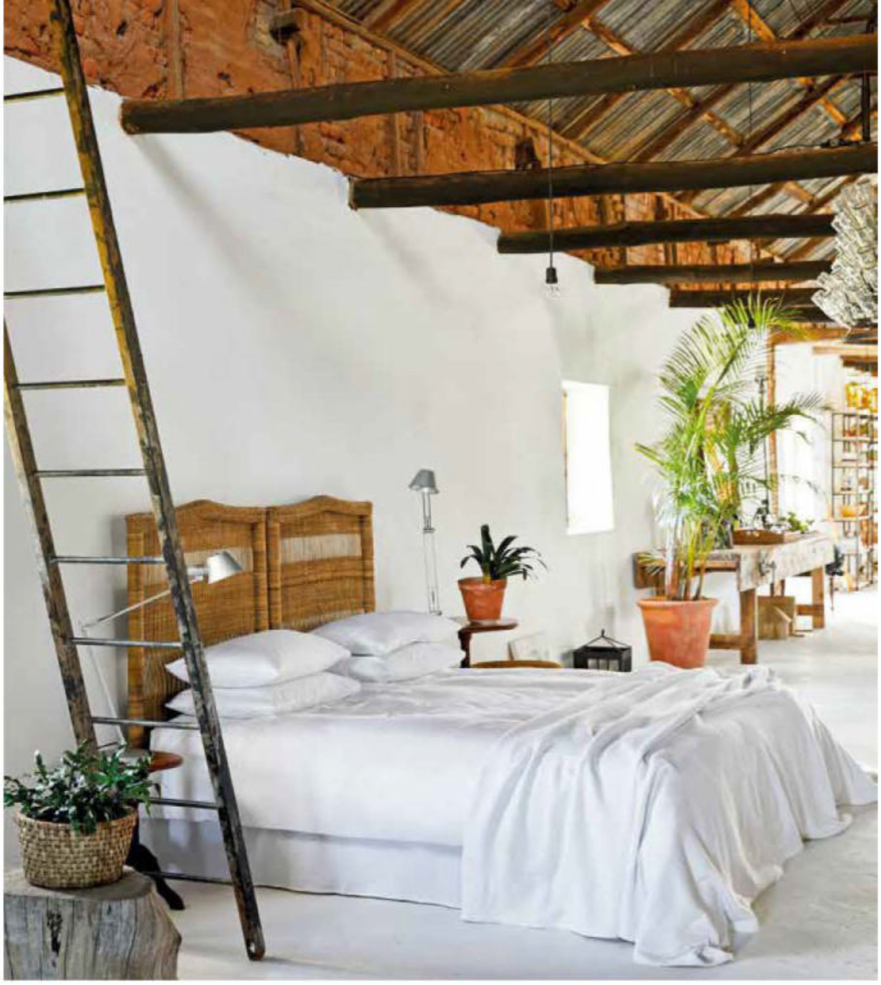
STYLING: SVEN ALBERDING; PHOTOS: WARREN HEATH/BUREAUX



↑ Past and Present

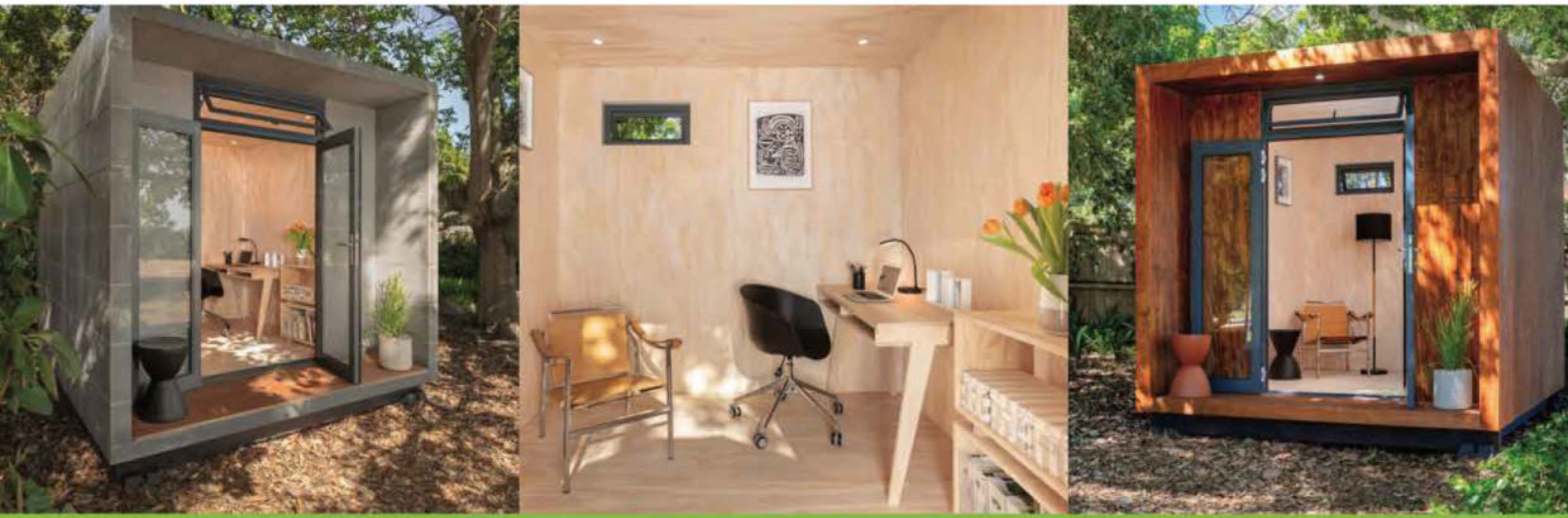
Roughly thrown concrete was fashioned to make basins, taking inspiration from feeding troughs that would have originally existed in the space of the converted milking shed.

Hanging pendant: designed by Illze and made by Hannes; **Round mirrors:** Coricraft



Sleep in Peace →

Bed: custom made; **Headboard:** Malawi Cane; **Linen:** @home; **Ladder:** found on Illze's childhood farm in the Karoo



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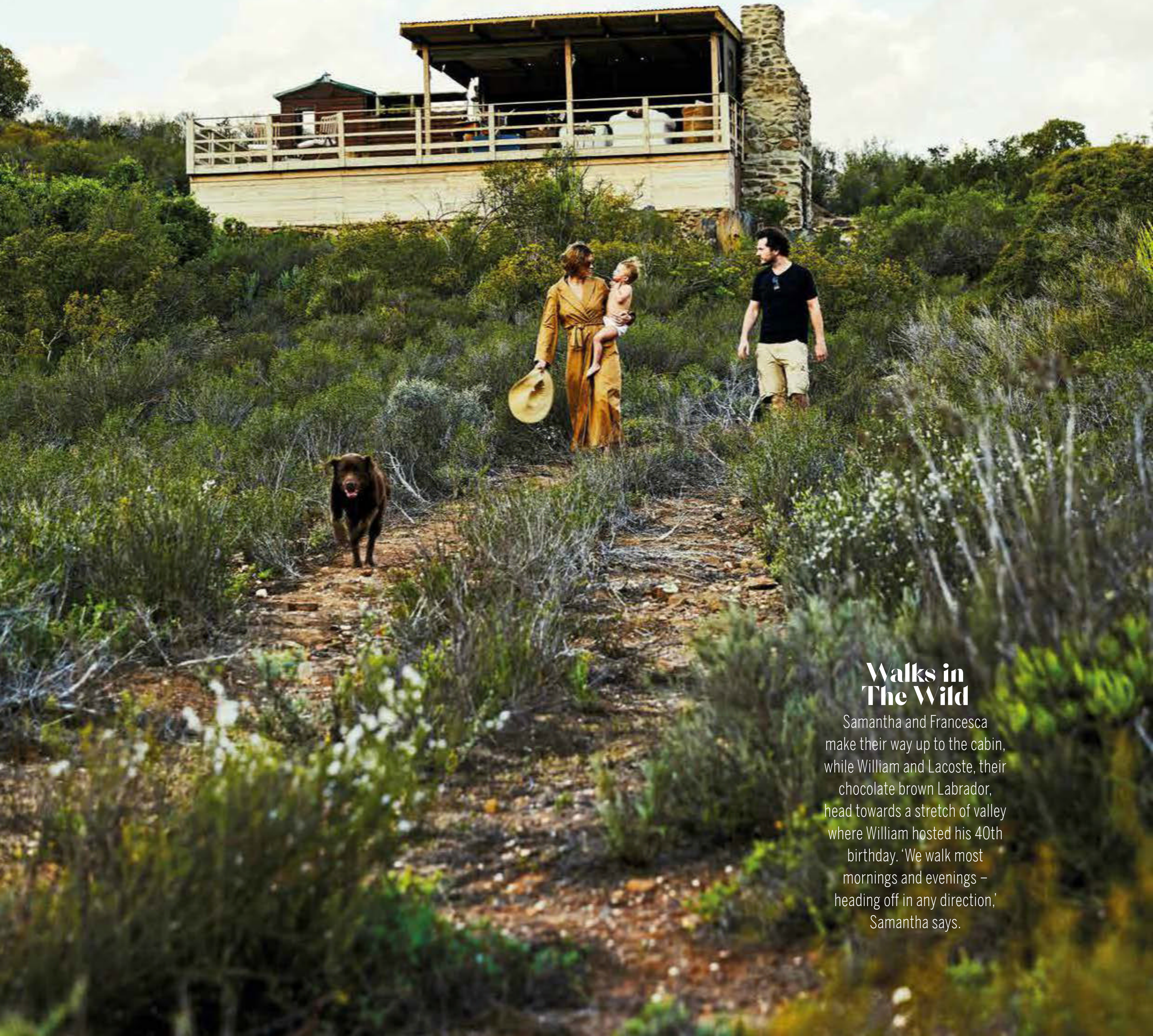
Force of NATURE

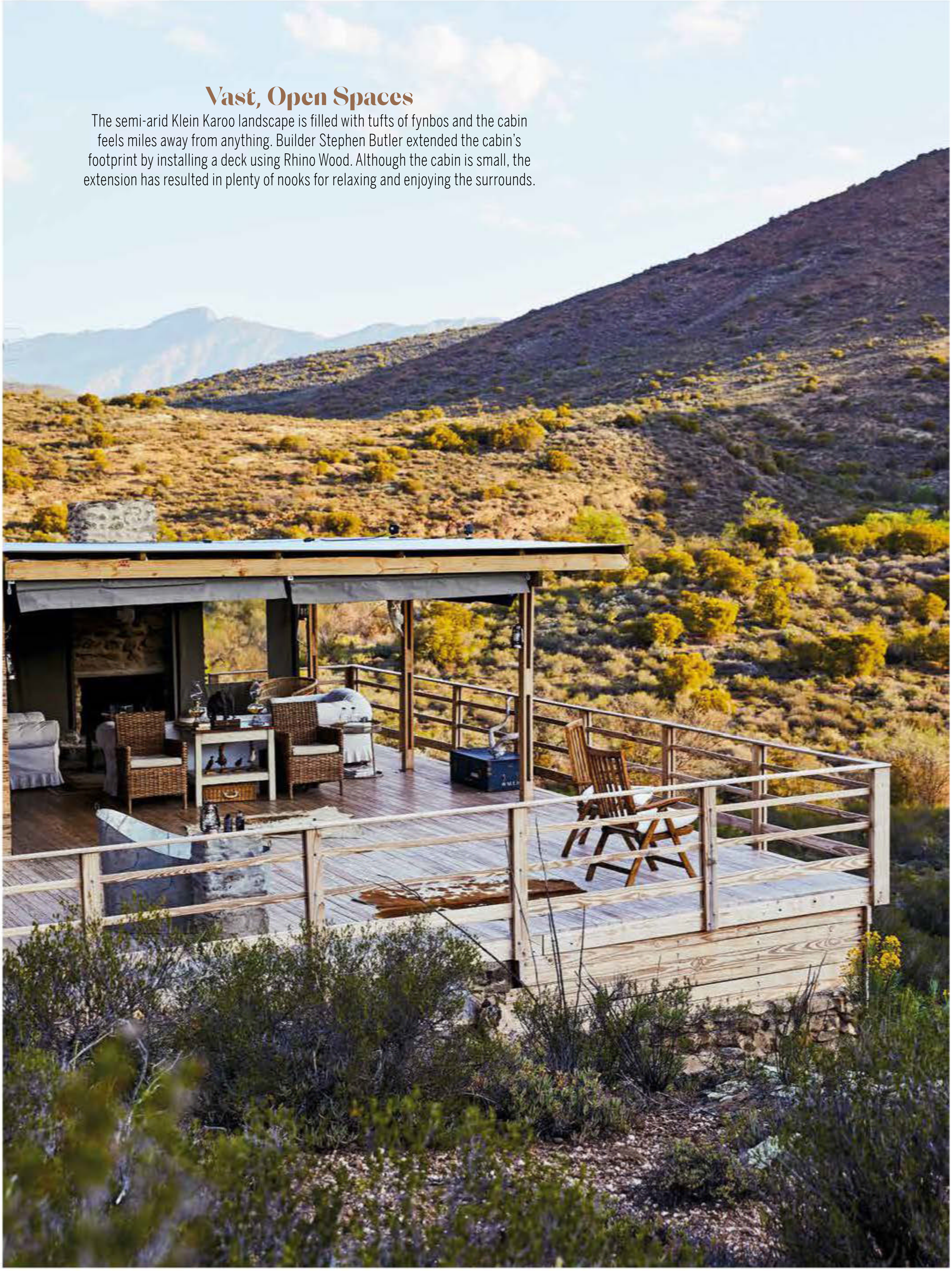
A young family's off-the-grid bush escape in South Africa's untamed Little Karoo blends modern campaign style with Provençal sensibility

BY JESSICA ROSS



Walks in The Wild

Samantha and Francesca make their way up to the cabin, while William and Lacoste, their chocolate brown Labrador, head towards a stretch of valley where William hosted his 40th birthday. 'We walk most mornings and evenings – heading off in any direction,' Samantha says.



Vast, Open Spaces

The semi-arid Klein Karoo landscape is filled with tufts of fynbos and the cabin feels miles away from anything. Builder Stephen Butler extended the cabin's footprint by installing a deck using Rhino Wood. Although the cabin is small, the extension has resulted in plenty of nooks for relaxing and enjoying the surrounds.

← Family Time in the Bush

Lacoste, Samantha, Francesca and William enjoy an afternoon in the bush.

↙ It's All in The Details

The kitchen has a warm farmhouse feel to it. Samantha is a collector of copper homeware, and the pieces she's incorporated perfectly complement the bush decor scheme. 'Guests often note the attention to detail,' says William, pointing out the brass touches in this space.

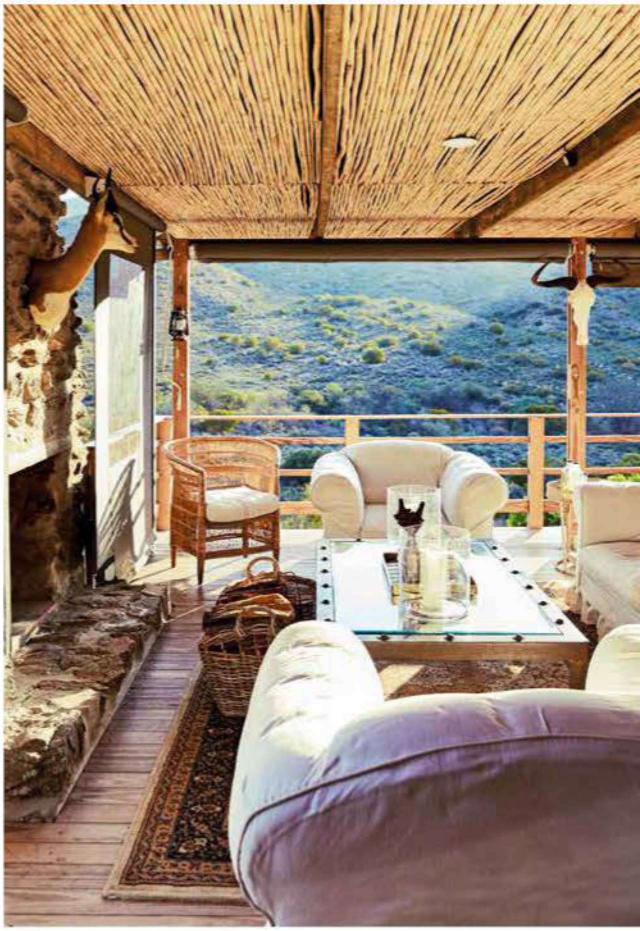
↙ Bare Bones

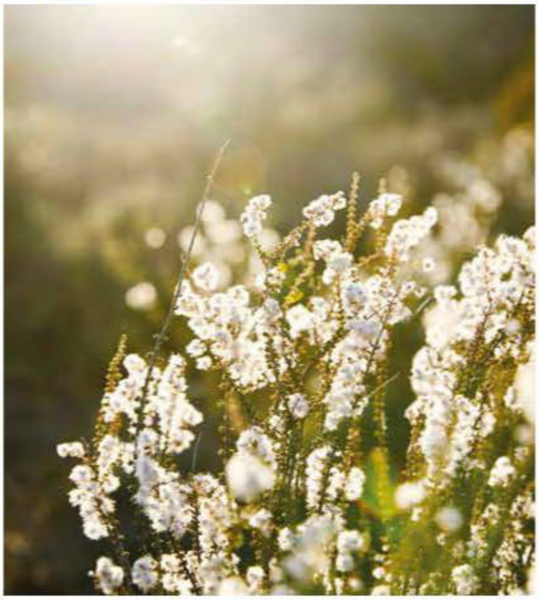
An animal skull presides over the living area.

Lounging Around ↘

The living room is a much-used zone year-round. In summer the family can be found getting some much-needed shade on the sink-in comfortable white sofas while winter calls for endless chats and red wine around a blazing fire. The fireplace was built using stone from the on-site quarry, reflecting the rocky surrounds. The coffee table is from Block & Chisel ***(blockandchisel.co.za)*** and the armchair is a Malawi cane piece that William exports around the world ***(malawichair.com).***

There are few scenes as idyllic as luxuriating in an outdoor tub in the middle of the South African bush, G&T in hand, quietly listening to the rising cacophony of birdsong and stridulating insects floating through the valley at dusk. For Samantha and William Mellor, this calming ritual is the essence of Cabine du Cap, their weekend bolt hole hidden away in the bush surrounds of the Western Cape's Klein Karoo. Immersed among rugged tufts of indigenous plants and undulating uninhabited landscape as far as the eye can see, the bath scene resembles something out of a Sydney Pollack movie. 'It all started with a dream to have an outdoor tub,' says Samantha, who carefully planned the placement of their open-air custom galvanised steel bath: just close enough to the edge of their deck to feel plunged within the surrounding scrub, and far enough from the roofing to have an eyeful of star-washed sky at night. 'We sometimes put on the whole *Out of Africa* soundtrack, sit in the bath and watch the sun





← Collectables Galore

A detail of the bedroom, where you can find evidence of the couple's predilection for collecting hats, maps and bird prints and drawings. The woven basket is from ***malawicane.com***.

↖ Learning Naturally

The pair have learned a great deal about surrounding nature, discovering species of plants, birds and animals.

← Brush-Strokes

Samantha is an avid painter, and loves to document the wildlife she finds in watercolour.

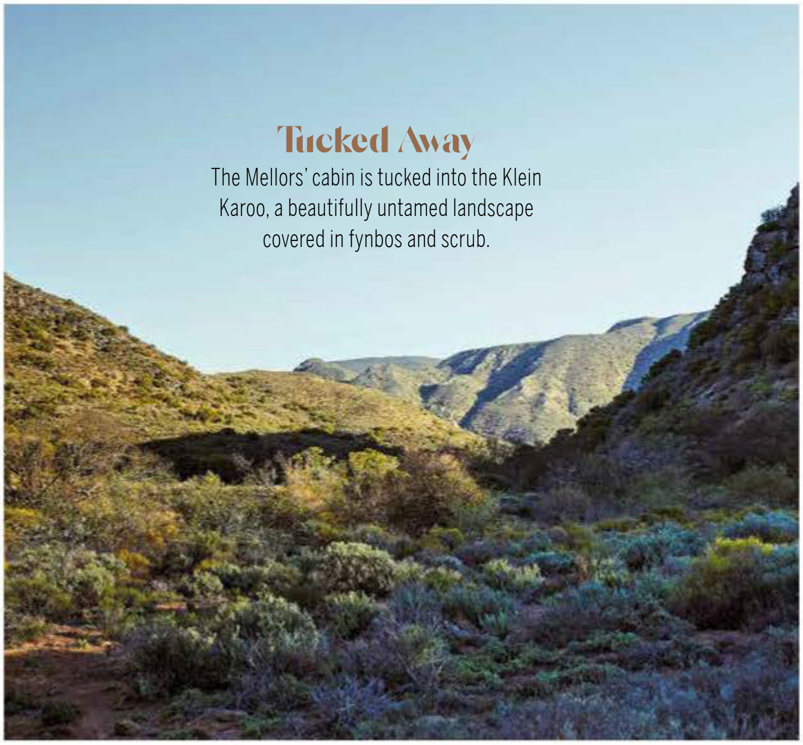
← Fynbos Diaries

The Mellors keep field notes of the various plant species they find around the cabin. This is kapokbossie, also known as the Cape Snow bush – referencing the spectacular imagery of the plant during the mornings.

set,' she explains with a laugh. 'It's a bit sentimental but we embrace it.'

When the couple first alighted on the property, located some two to three hours' drive from Cape Town just off the famous R62 motorway, the existing ramshackle boma was dwarfed by its majestic environment. 'It was really just a piece of land. The boma was falling apart, but it was the first place we looked at and we could see its potential,' Samantha explains. The couple, their three-year-old daughter, Francesca, and chocolate brown Labrador, Lacoste, started visiting on weekends, travelling up a precarious road to the boma, where they would spend days improving the infrastructure and nights listening out for the strange sounds of nearby wildlife.

'The first thing we needed to address was the connectivity,' says William, who quickly installed single-battery solar panels to ensure they had Wi-Fi. 'There's this fantasy of being totally disconnected – no cellphone signal, nothing – but that's not realistic when you have a baby and



Tucked Away

The Mellors' cabin is tucked into the Klein Karoo, a beautifully untamed landscape covered in fynbos and scrub.

there are scorpions in the area,' William notes. 'When we want to switch off, we simply turn off the Wi-Fi, but we've kept our footprint light – we use gas, solar power and rainwater. It is totally off-the-grid.'

As founder and CEO at *2oceansvibe.com*, an award-winning media brand, William is rarely afforded the opportunity to be switched off. A quick success in a city after which it is named, *2oceansvibe.com* encompasses Cape Town's laid-back lifestyle with its 'Work is a sideline. Live the holiday' tag line, and quickly grew from blog to multimedia news and marketing platform within a few years. Joining forces with Samantha, the couple now heads up the 'du Cap Collection' sub-brand, a group of France-meets-Africa-inspired properties that are available for holiday rental, and a cafe and boutique in Cape Town's inner city serving country-style fare alongside furniture and fashion finds from France. Cabine du Cap is the latest to join the stable.

Francophiles at heart, Samantha and William's style vision for Cabine was inspired by the Provençal countryside, particularly the lavender-

Cheers!

After long walks in the bush, the couple retreats to the bar for the requisite G&T. Some of the wooden objects that double up as toys for Francesca are found on the bar counter. Lanterns peppered throughout the cabin lend a warm glow to the space in the evening.

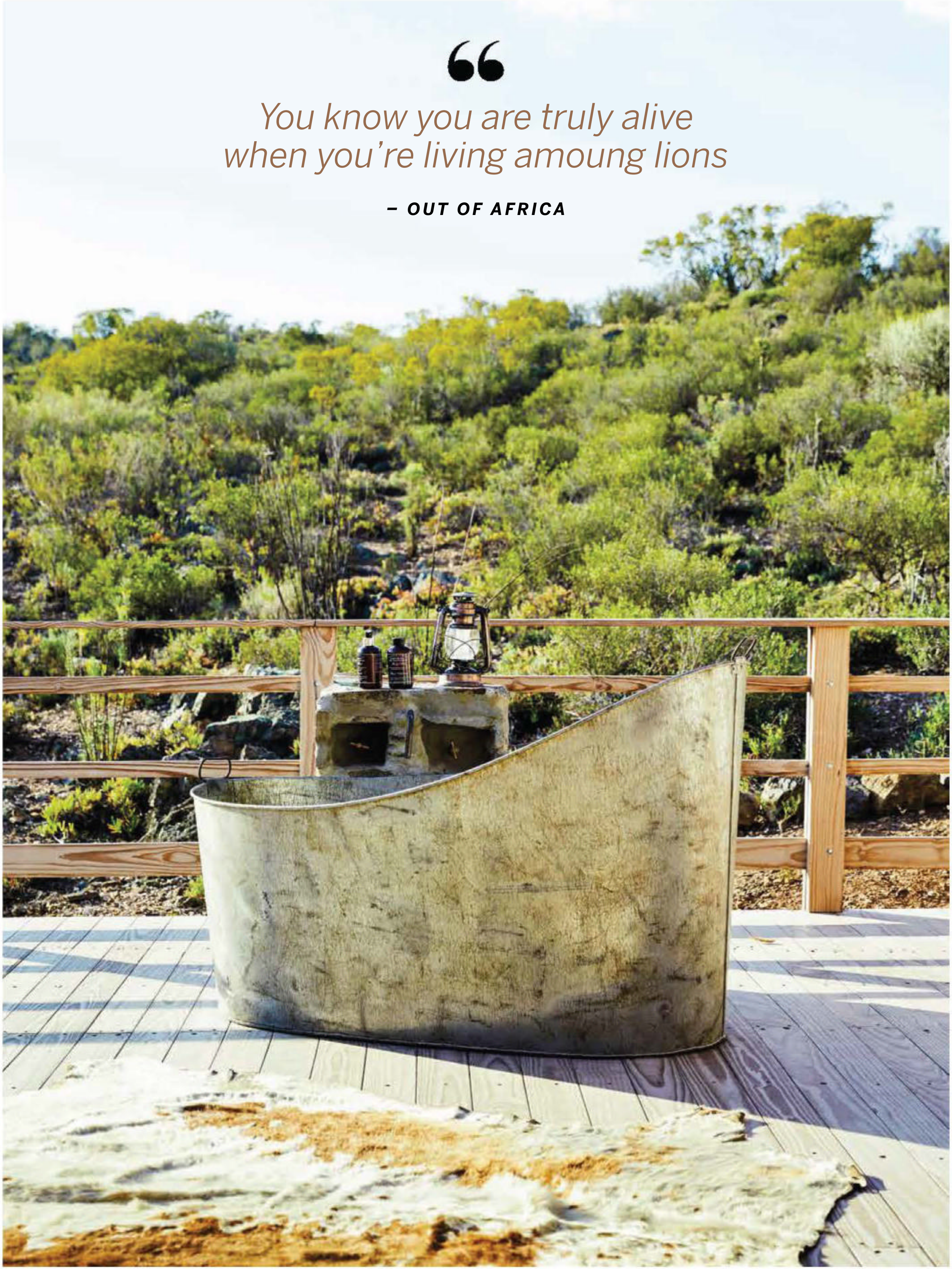
↑ Springbok Style

Mounted above the fireplace, the springbok head transports visitors to a different time, from the pages of a meaty Wilbur Smith novel.

Bathtime Bliss →

The bath was custom made for the Mellors, and it's become the absolute favourite feature of the house. Hides were bought from roadside vendors.

> “
>
> *You know you are truly alive when you’re living amoung lions*
>
> ***– OUT OF AFRICA***



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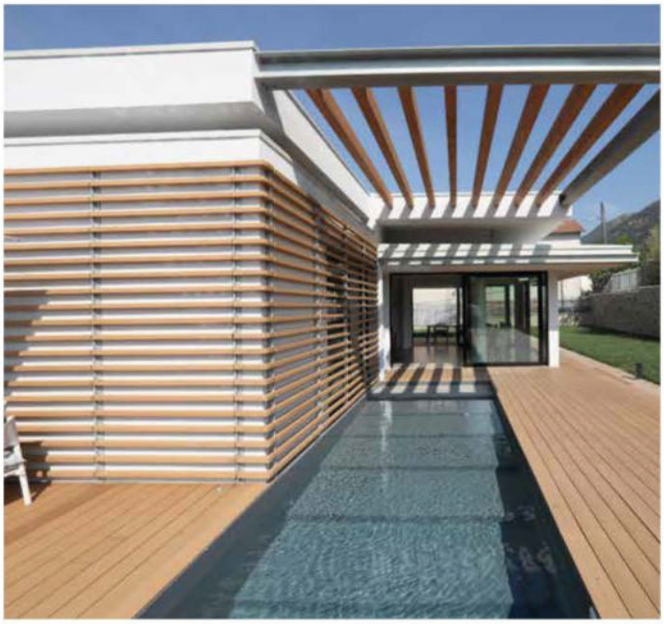

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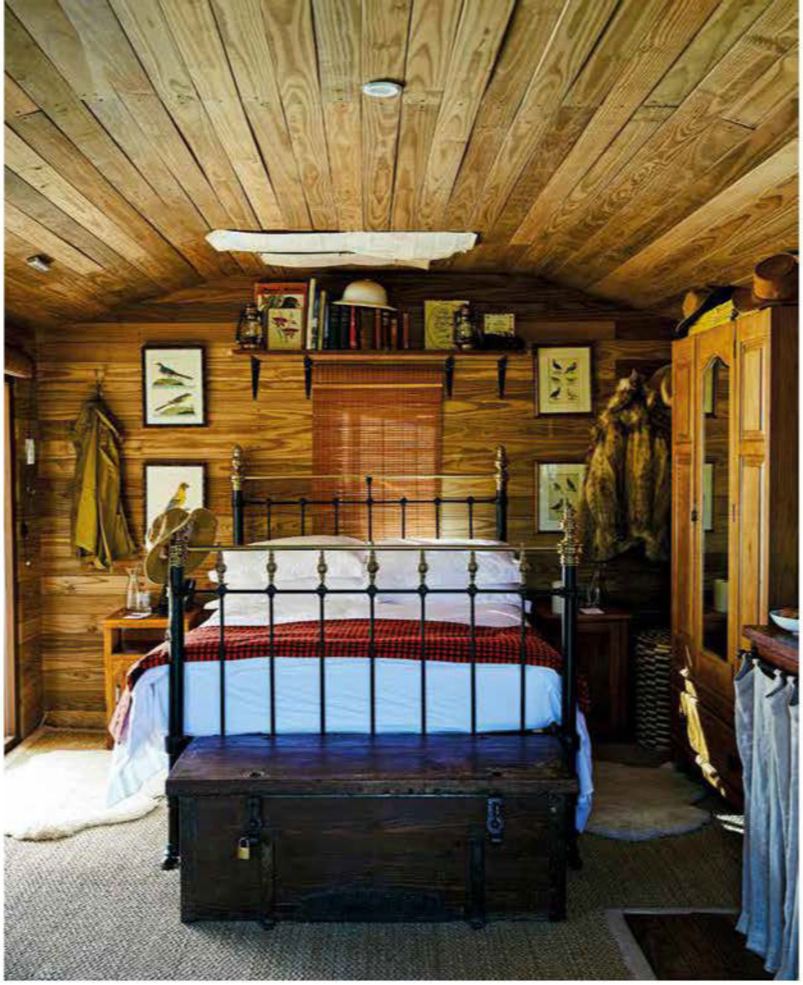
Boma Beauty

The couple have created a number of seating areas around the cabin. Summers are spent between swimming in the pool and drying off and reading in the boma.



swathed village of Luberon where they were married. Melding this with the campaign look typical of contemporary safari getaways and a quintessential bushveld vernacular, the Mellors uncovered their signature aesthetic. 'The three themes work really well together,' says William, and Samantha chimes in, 'When you go for walks at the cabin it's a lot like being in the south of France. It's funny how the two places seem so different but actually are quite alike. They are our two favourite areas.'

To articulate this vision in a small run-down cabin was going to take some work, so they asked local builder Stephen Butler to oversee the renovation. 'We fell in love with a material called Rhino Wood because of how it blends into the setting,' says Samantha. This was used for the decking, expanding the living space and integrating the cabin with its environment. With the couple's direction, Butler also created a stone walled fireplace – 'an essential addition for winter nights,' William notes. Yet no matter how cool it gets in winter, there's a warmth that's imbued by the Rhino Wood, which extends from the deck to indoor floors, walls and ceiling.

The interiors were Samantha's domain, having worked in the retail industry for over 10 years. Collections of vintage suitcases and bird motifs are found throughout the cabin along with game skulls and a taxidermy springbok head, mounted above the fireplace – reminding visitors to keep an eye out for game on the property with Rhebok and Klipspringer often sighted in the early morning hours.

The couple are resourceful when it comes to finding special pieces, scouring classifieds and auctions and making use of family hand-me-downs. For Samantha, inspiration came in many forms – movies ('I just love that house in *Out of Africa*'), French markets and the towers of interior publications and journals she surrounds herself with. However, nothing was as influential as the land itself and so a neutral, earthy palette mimics the semi-arid Karoo landscape, and books about the plants and birds found in the area pack the shelves.

'What's really been amazing is how much we have learned about birds and the bush – we can actually name some of the plant species,' says Samantha, who delights in pointing out a nearby botterboom to visiting family from Europe. The couple have a love for the fynbos that covers the Karoo, admiring its changing seasonal hues, from yellow, to red and then a purple haze of Ericas in the cooler months. They're also taking note of weather patterns and teaching Francesca about it all. 'At night the stars take you aback. I know, it sounds like a cliché,' he concedes with a smile, 'but you don't really understand until you're there: it's completely silent, the moon is like a spotlight… You stand there and all your troubles go away.'

cabineducap.com

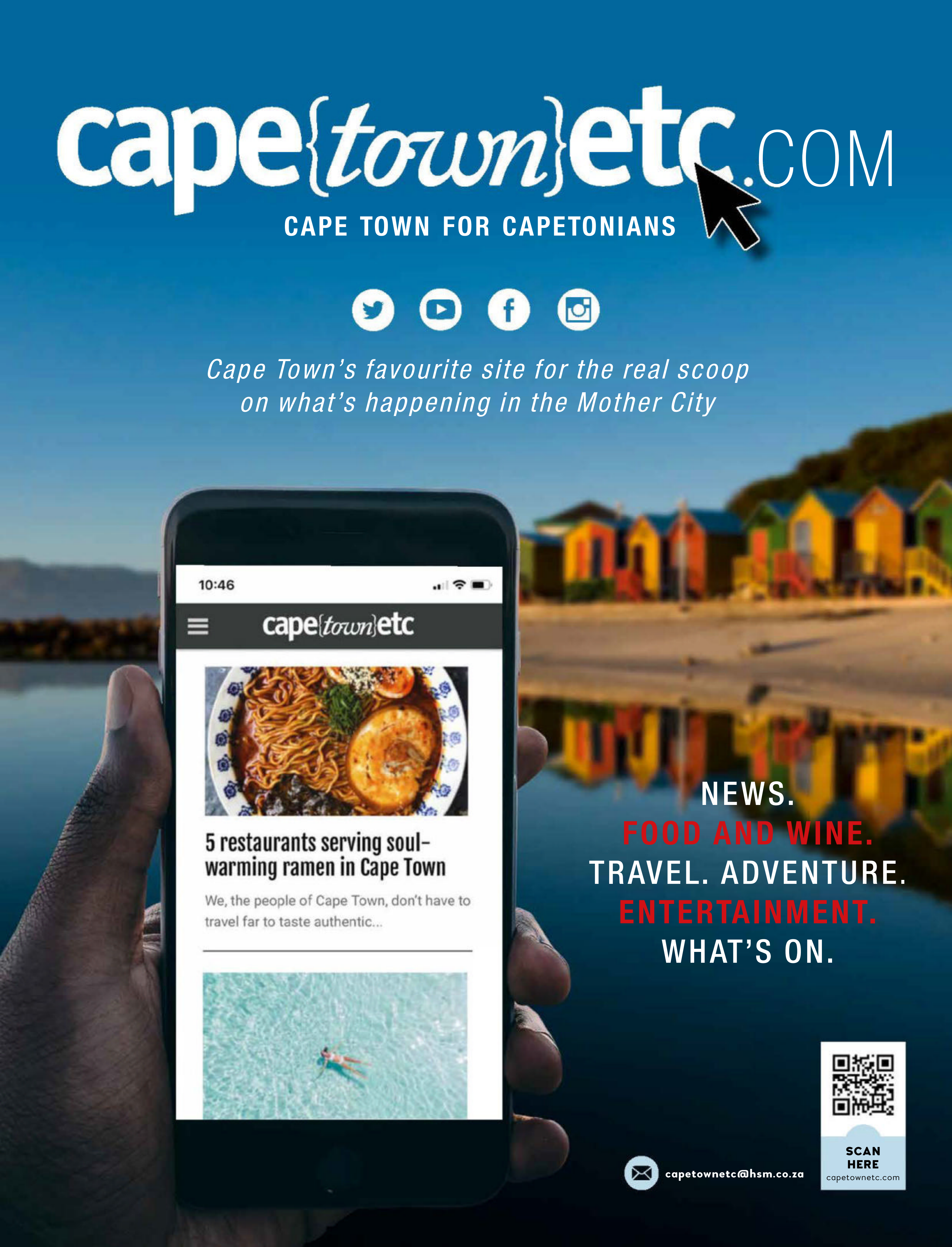
↑ High Flyers

The wood-clad bedroom is filled with campaign-style pieces and considered decor touches, such as the ornithological drawings and maps. William, who holds a valid pilot license, pasted aviation charts above the bed, showing routes to fly in the Western Cape. 'Part of the dream of this place was finding somewhere we could fly to,' says Samantha. The bed is a centuries-old piece that the couple found.

Soaked in Nature →

Outdoor showers are a wonderfully indulgent way to start the day in nature, and Samantha and William have stocked theirs with amenities from Africology. A low-voltage marine pump was used to afford the greater water pressure for the oversized shower head.

STYLING: SVEN ALBERDING/ BUREAUX; PHOTOS: WARREN HEATH/ BUREAUX



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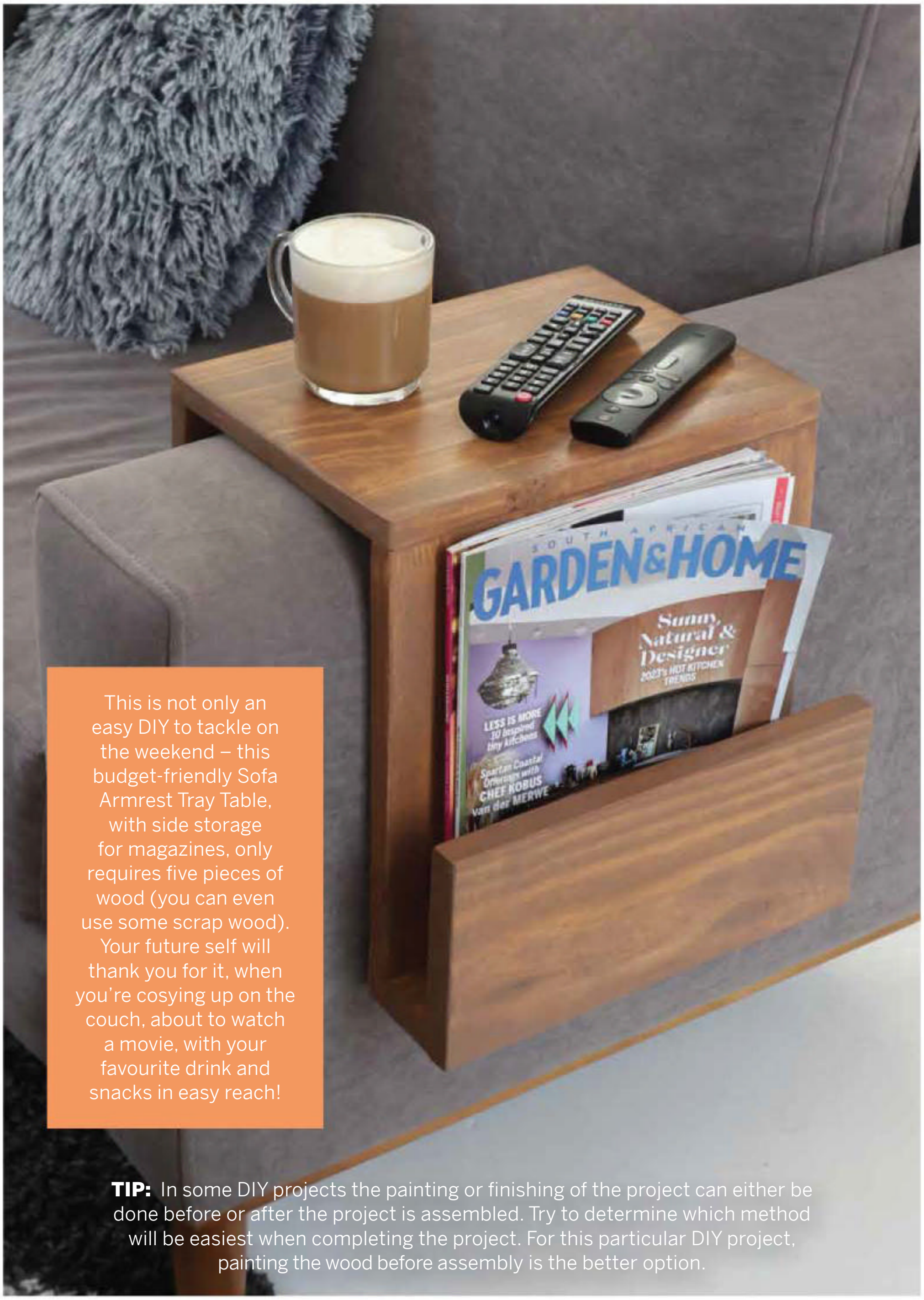
How To DIY A
TRAY TABLE

Functional and aesthetically pleasing, drinks, snacks and reading material will always be within easy reach thanks to this nifty addition to your sofa

BY ELLE FRANCO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2023's HOT KITCHEN TRENDS
LESS IS MORE 30 inspired tiny kitchens
Spartan Coastal Offerings with CHEF KOBUS van der MERWE

This is not only an easy DIY to tackle on the weekend – this budget-friendly Sofa Armrest Tray Table, with side storage for magazines, only requires five pieces of wood (you can even use some scrap wood). Your future self will thank you for it, when you're cosying up on the couch, about to watch a movie, with your favourite drink and snacks in easy reach!

TIP: In some DIY projects the painting or finishing of the project can either be done before or after the project is assembled. Try to determine which method will be easiest when completing the project. For this particular DIY project, painting the wood before assembly is the better option.

PROJECT: How to DIY a Sofa Armrest Tray Table

TIME TO COMPLETE:
+–4.5 hours

TOOLS NEEDED:
- Compound mitre saw or circular saw to cut the wood to size
- Orbital sander with 120- and 180-grit sanding paper disc
- Power drill
- Kreg pocket hole jig and collar step drill bit and pocket hole screws (32 mm length)
- Wood stain/clear sealant and a paintbrush or sponge roller tray set
- Wood glue (optional)
- Measuring tape, pencil and a speed square
- Medium size spreader clamps

PPE: face mask, gloves, ear plugs, protective eyeglasses and safety shoes

MATERIALS REQUIRED:
Pine wood used for this specific sofa armrest measurements:

Cutting list: five pieces of wood **A, B, C, D and E**

A. 1 + 19 mm + 200 mm + 305 mm (short side of armrest table)
B. 1 + 19 mm + 220 mm + 305 mm (armrest tray tabletop)
C. 1 + 19 mm + 300 mm +

Meet

Elle

Elle has been hitting the nail on the head for the last eight years. Never shying away from projects big or small, she's up for the challenge and uses her own home as her project workshop and experimental space from season to season.

305 mm (long side of armrest tray table)

D. 1 + 19 mm + 45 mm + 305 mm (base of side storage ledge)

E. 1 + 19 mm + 140 mm + 305 mm (side of side storage ledge)

HOW TO:

STEP 1: Take down dimensions and cut the wood

Use a tape measure to determine the dimensions of your specific sofa armrest to build a custom size that will fit.

Once you have all those measurements marked down, identify the five pieces of wood you will need for this project. The number of wood pieces and the assembly process in this project will remain the same but the size or measurements of the project will differ according to the specific type of sofa it is being made for.

Cut all your wood to size, using either a circular saw or a compound mitre saw. Always remember to wear the appropriate PPE when you are working with any power tools.

STEP 2: Sand and paint your wood pieces

Using an orbital sander with the sanding disc of 120-grit paper attached, sand all the wood pieces. Continue using your orbital sander, with the sanding disc of 120-grit paper attached, to sand the two ladders making sure all the edges, surfaces and wood filler are smooth.

Depending on the roughness and quality of your wood, you can sand the pieces again by loading a 180-grit sandpaper disc onto the orbital sander until the desired smoothness is reached.

Wipe away excess sawdust. Paint and stain the wood pieces by using either a paintbrush or sponge roller tray set.

Use any colour stain or paint you wish to cover the wood pieces. For this project, a medium wood stain for interior use was applied.

Apply two coats and allow for drying time between coats.

STEP 3: Label the wood pieces and dry fit

Before using the pocket hole jig to make pocket holes for the assembly of these wood pieces, it would be a good idea to label each piece, A, B, C, D and E.

Take small sections of masking tape and use a marker/pencil to write the letters and stick them onto the correlating wood piece.

This will help you dry fit the pieces together to determine which side to join and where to make the pocket holes.

STEP 4: Using pocket hole joinery

For this project a pocket hole jig was used – the pocket holes are not visible, resulting in a desirable, seamless-looking surface.

Adjust the settings of the jig and the depth of the collar on the step drill bit to the mark that correlates to the width measurement of the wood pieces, which are all at a 19 mm thickness. (Proper instructions on how to use the pocket hole jig and its attachments can be found in the user manual or on instructional videos online.)

This correct width adjustment helps the pocket hole jig to perfectly set a pocket hole at the right depth into the wood thickness, when you use a power drill to drill the step drill bit down the guide holes of the jig. The correct depth of the pocket hole ensures that the pocket hole screw fits and then pulls the two pieces of wood together in a tight and strong pocket hole join.

STEP 5: Drilling pocket holes

Each wood piece fits into the next piece. Wood piece A connects into B, B into C, C fits into D and then D into piece E.

With using pocket hole joinery, pocket holes can only be made into one side of the wood on the same face or underside of that wood piece, to join to another.

Once your pocket hole jig and collar on the step drill bit have been set to the 19 mm mark, insert your step collar drill bit into your power drill, then tighten and secure the chuck.

Secure the pocket hole jig to your workstation so that it doesn't move while drilling the pocket holes.

Next, take wood piece A, place it on the pocket hole jig and use the jig clamp to clamp it into position, lining up with the drill guide holes. Drill one pocket hole 4 cm from the edge of the wood, and then unclamp and leave an estimated 15 cm gap before re-clamping the wood piece into position again and drilling the next pocket hole.

STEP 6: Assemble and drive in pocket hole screws

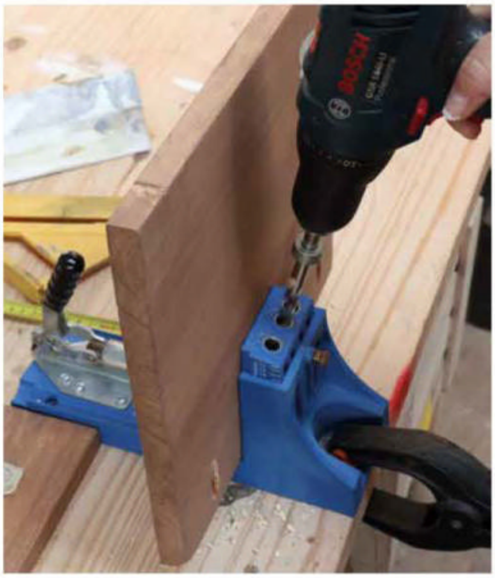
Line up one wood piece, with the next and use spreader clamps to hold in position. Once you are happy with the position, insert the square tip long driver bit into your power drill and secure the chuck.

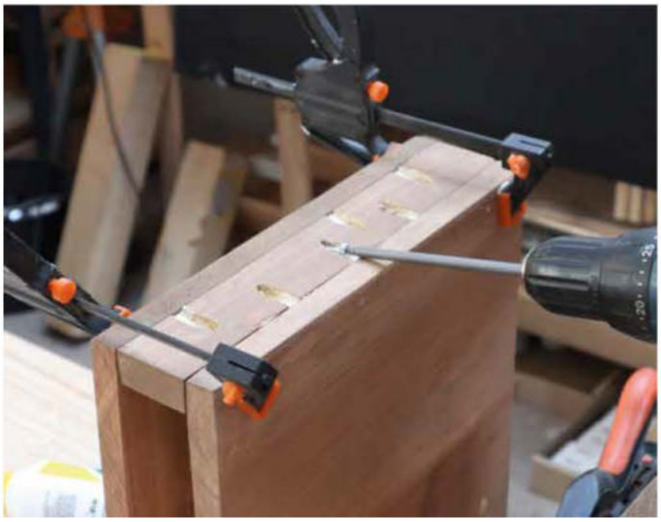
Make use of clamps to hold wood into position while driving in screws.

In each pocket hole made, place a (32 mm length) pocket hole screw and then connect the tip of the driver bit with the square screw head and drive the screw into the pocket hole until the screws pull the two pieces of wood together.

Do this for all the pocket holes and secure all the screws until all your wood pieces are assembled and joined together and look like a sofa armrest tray table.

NOTE: If the choice of pocket hole joinery isn't an option, many other wood joinery methods can be used to assemble this project. Another easy option would be to apply wood glue, then drill pilot holes and drive and countersink in the appropriate wood screws to join the wood pieces together. Be sure to use wood filler to cover unsightly holes.





OPTIONAL STEP: Seal the project

On top of the wood stain, depending on whether you have used a wood stain with a built-in protective topcoat or not, you can apply a clear polyurethane sealant in a matt or semi-gloss finish, to make your sofa armrest tray table more resistant to stains and improve the longevity of the DIY for years to come.

Place your fave magazines in the side storage ledge (like this *Garden&Home* magazine!)

Pour a drink, sit back and relax – you have earned it. Enjoy your new DIY project and remember to always use a coaster!

Helpful Info:

If you want to know more about pocket hole joinery you can watch my YouTube video on this link.

PLEASE NOTE:

When joining with a pocket hole jig, make sure that there are at least two or more pocket holes made on one piece of wood to join, and on longer wood lengths a pocket hole a minimum of every 15 cm for a strong join. And always remember they must be made on the same facing side.

- For piece A, on the same facing side, drill two evenly spaced pocket holes on the one end that join to piece B.
- Do not make pocket holes in wood piece B and E.
- In wood piece C make two evenly spaced pocket holes on the end, on the same face that joins to piece B.
- For the piece labelled D, make 2 to 3 pocket holes in the length of the short width of this wood piece, in one direction, to join to wood piece C. Again make another 2 to 3 pocket holes in the other direction to join to wood piece E (see Images).

When using pocket hole joinery, it is optional to add wood glue to the joins, as they are a strong enough join without adding wood glue.

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF DIY WITH ELLE

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HOT TOPIC

INSPIRED IDEAS

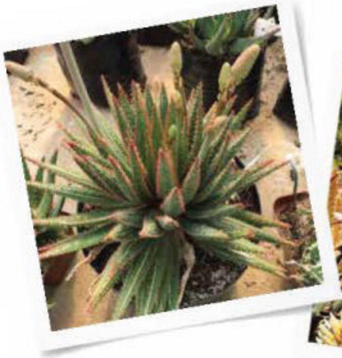
Each year, garden lovers' calendars are filled with global events to look forward to. Of the many international events of the year, the Melbourne International Flower and Garden Show offers plenty of inspiration for South African gardeners. With a similar climate, shared planting choices and a love of outdoor entertaining, any of these prize-winning Australian gardens can inspire your next project.

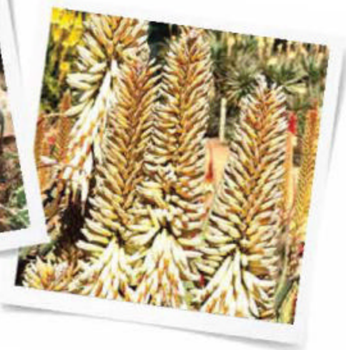
PHOTO: MELBOURNE INTERNATIONAL FLOWER AND GARDEN SHOW

'ALLO ALOE

Aloes are a must-have for every South African winter garden

BY MADISON MOULTON





← Aloe 'Ice cream'

With a sweet name and an even sweeter look, 'Ice cream' is bound to catch your eye wherever you plant it. This aloe is appreciated for its bi-coloured flowers, with salmon pink flowers at the top that fade down to a creamy white as they open. Although the plants look great on their own, they are even more impressive when planted en masse.

↑ Aloe 'Crunchy'

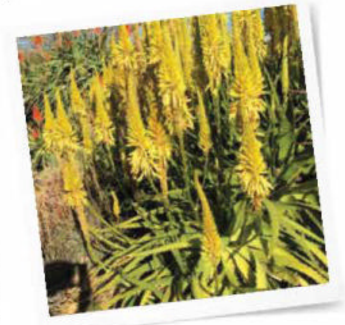
Many gardeners grow aloes for their attractive flowers. However, when it comes to 'Crunchy', the leaves are the standout. Covered in small red spines that give the plant a warm glow from afar, this aloe provides wonderful texture anywhere it is planted. The compact size makes it great for planting in small gardens or in containers. It produces lovely, sweet-scented, yellow flowers in winter.

Aloe 'White Rhino' ↗

For those who prefer muted tones in their gardens, 'White Rhino' is ideal. Rather than the bright and warm colours most aloes sport, this cultivar features creamy white blooms that pop up around this time each year. The plants are fast growers, reaching around 1.5 m in height at maturity.

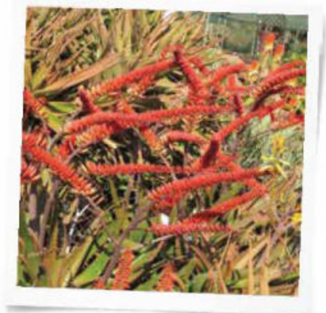
Aloe 'Lemonade' ↘

To brighten your garden when temperatures dip, you can't go wrong with 'Lemonade'. This cheerful aloe produces masses of sunny yellow flowers that will instantly make you smile and pair well with other warm-toned plants. Much like 'Ice Cream', it's best to plant several in the same spot for an impressive show of flowers every June.



Aloe 'Red Horizon' ↘

The fantastic flowers of 'Red Horizon' will satisfy any aloe collectors looking for something a little more unique. True to the name, the flowers of this cultivar grow horizontally, giving the entire plant a shape not often seen among aloes. Try planting these aloes on a slope to take advantage of this interesting form. Find these aloes and more at ***www.cndnursery.co.za***



PHOTOS: ANDY DE WET

MAKHRO
HOME AND GARDEN

Say aloe to my little friends.

White scale on aloe plants is becoming a common pest among gardeners. What will start off looking like white dust not only causes your plant to look unsightly, but if left untreated, it will spread to other aloes and eventually kill the plant. These tiny insects, approximately 1-2mm in length, gradually cover the whole aloe plant, sucking the sap and depriving it of sunlight to the extent that it deteriorates and dies.

Luckily, we have a solution to this problem. We successfully treated this pest on aloe plants with the product combination of Makhro Plant Care and Sk Eco Oil.

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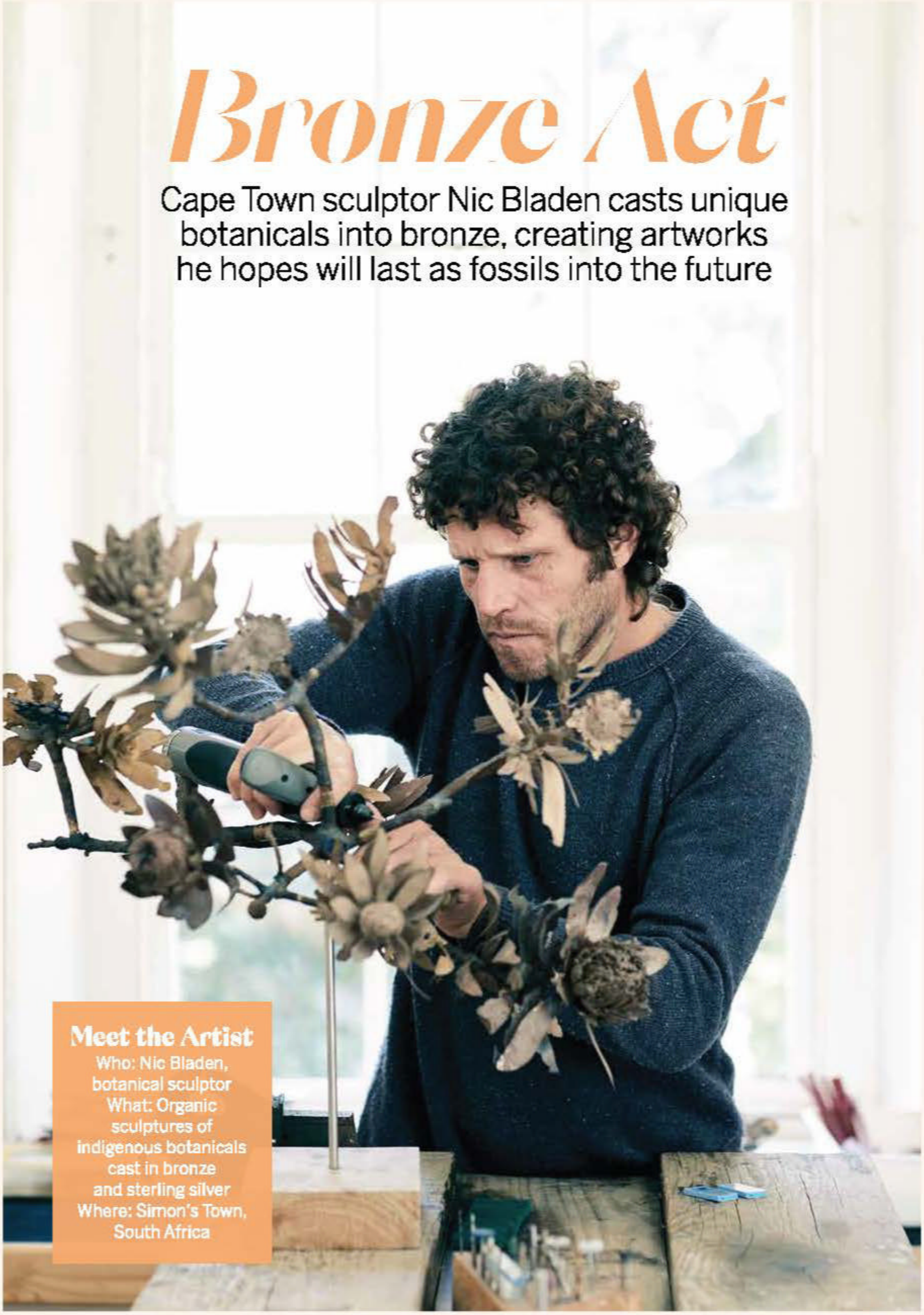
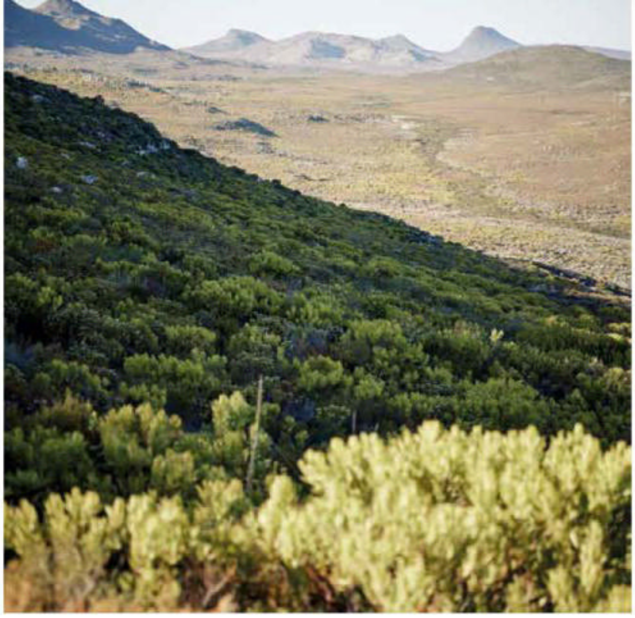
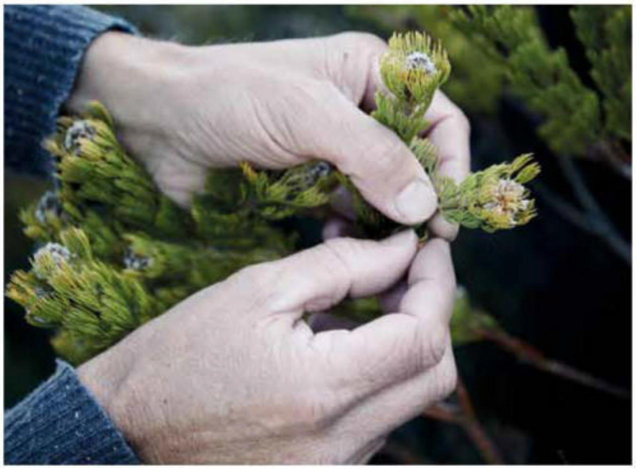
Bronze Act

Cape Town sculptor Nic Bladen casts unique botanicals into bronze, creating artworks he hopes will last as fossils into the future



Meet the Artist
Who: Nic Bladen, botanical sculptor
What: Organic sculptures of indigenous botanicals cast in bronze and sterling silver
Where: Simon's Town, South Africa





'Somehow the orchid fraternity got hold of me.'

It sounds like a plot twist in a floral conspiracy novel, but this was perhaps the turning point in sculptor Nic Bladen's career. From making a living creating jewellery (which admittedly was very well received), Nic was asked by the president of the local orchid society if he would cast a few whole orchids in bronze.

A former dental technician, Nic had learned about bronze sculpture under the watchful eye of Jan-Otto du Plessis at Bronze Age Foundry before going on his own. He'd been struggling along when the orchid request came.

'One day I cast a flower and that was it. Light-bulb moment. I'm casting at 0.3 mm, but I am also casting tree stumps. It's a marriage of the disciplines.'

The orchid job successfully executed, the penny dropped about how beautiful organic matter casting can be and Nic embarked on a botanical path that has taken him to where he is today, exhibiting in the Everard Read Gallery in both London and across South Africa and with a workshop in a heritage building in Simon's Town.

Simon's Town, along the Cape Peninsula's southern side is a quaint little coastal village but at street level, its architecture, fish 'n' chip shops and pubs are more reminiscent of Cornwall than it is of anything South African. The similarities end where the town hits the mountain slopes it is built on. Surrounded by the Cape fold mountains, the area is covered in indigenous flora

Lost in the Mountains

Nic collecting plant matter in the Baskloof Fynbos Reserve, which is situated 'over the mountain' from his studio on the coastal belt above the small settlement of Scarborough. On clear days, you can see the Cape of Good Hope in the distance. Nic's Spinone Italiano, Bruhno, follows his every step.

from proteas to buchu and thousands of other species in between. Some common, many rare; this is Nic's foraging ground.

His process is relatively simple in concept but difficult to get right. 'I go for a walk, find a plant or get some cuttings, legally, and then it starts with some very simple jewellery moulding practices. In normal jewellery this would be a wax form, something you carved yourself or did in a mould. Sometimes it does not work.

'Things that get in the way include ego and overconfidence. Whenever you think things are going well, a bus hits you. Sometimes a mould cracks, or I get a hole in the mould and once you pour in the metal it falls through the hole and that's wasted, so it's just about being mindful of each and every task you undertake. Go slow and do every single move correctly. If you are not there, you have to do it over.

'I think there are 361 protea species in Southern Africa, I'm planning to build a mobile studio. All my tools fit into my trailer and I can pull it into any landscape and pull out my drawer, there's my oven, there are my vacuum tables and on the other side is a Bunsen burner, and the equipment I need for the foundation work. Then I have a mould. Collectively all I need can fit in a box. I hit the road with all my stuff, Bruhno in tow.'

← Preparation is Key

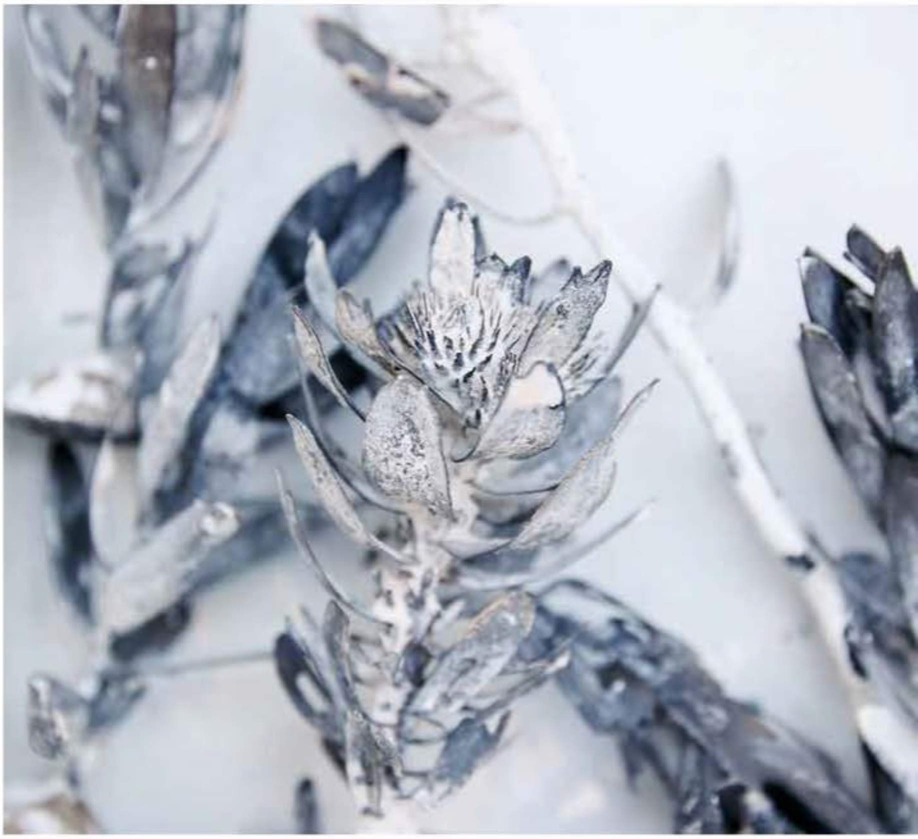
Nic is preparing a cast for one of his plant sculptures. The plants are attached to the base of the cast and the cylinder is then filled with plaster of paris.

↙ Art in Action

Pouring the liquid bronze into the cast.

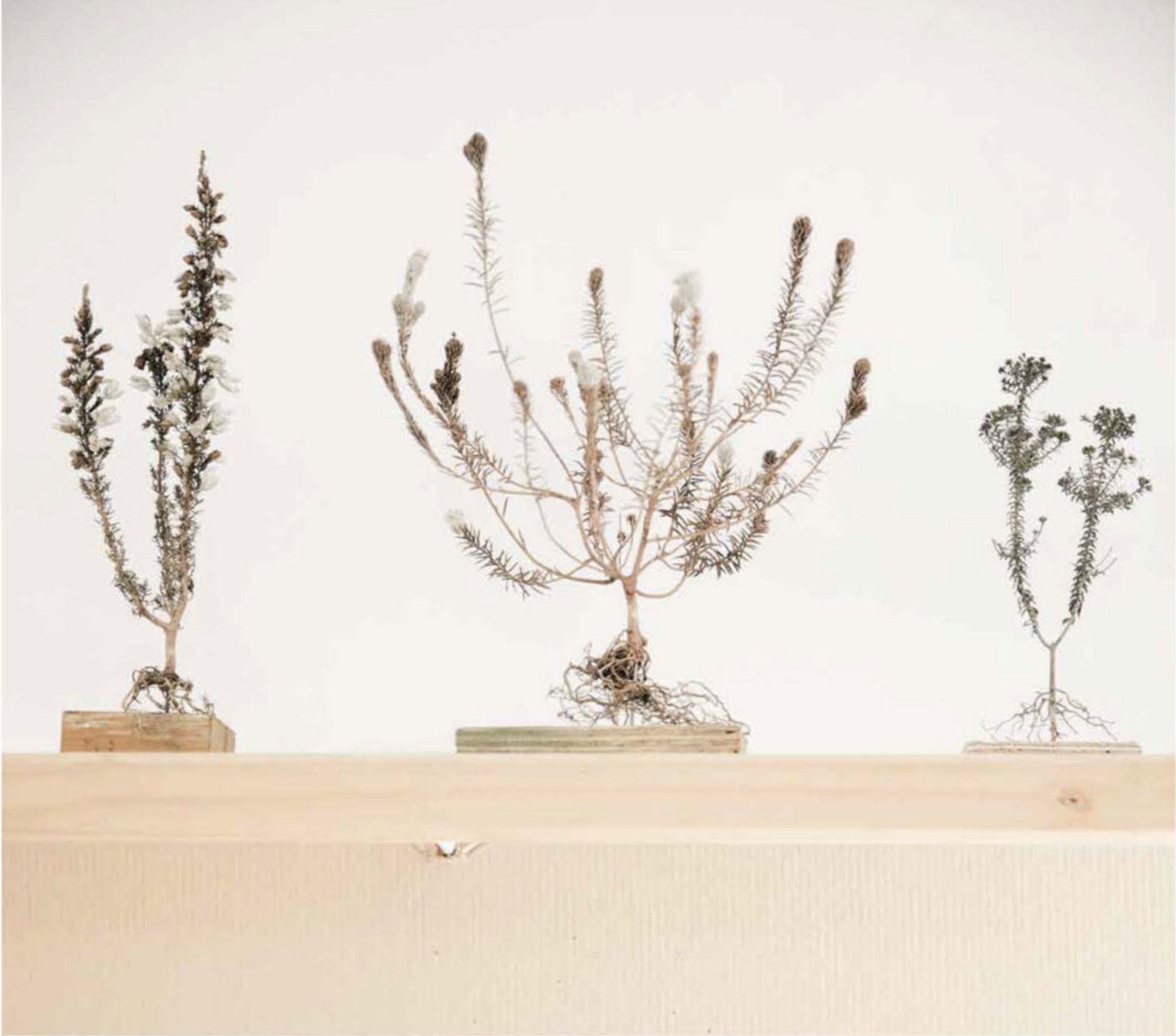
↓ Finished Product

A freshly cast *Leucospermum oleifolium*, (Overberg pincushion).



> These plants might not be here in 200 years' time. I'm making metal fossils
>
> **– NIC BLADEN**

Indigenous Delights
Nic is working on a *Protea nitida* (dwarf).



The Collection

From left to right:
Erica monsoniana,
(Bokkevelds heath)
Phylica gnidioides
(Pink phylica)
Agathosma ciliaris
(Mountain buchu)

Many of the plants Nic is casting are endangered and although he is trying to shine a light on their status and the threat of global warming, he also does not want to be accused of collecting plants illegally.

'I found my first plant growing in the middle of a path where people mountain bike. It didn't stand a chance so it was coming with me. I don't just stop and pick stuff on the side of the road, because it's illegal. If somebody asks me about where the plants come from, I can say, "This came from a privately owned piece of land up near Scarborough where I have permission to harvest. Here's a photo with the GPS coordinates if you would like to see, here's my letter and there's the sticker on my car when I park".'

The big idea is to hitch his trailer, go up to East Africa and cast the flowering proteas of Uganda and then drive south, capturing all of the proteas he can along the way from the eastern escarpment back down to South Africa's Limpopo province where there are lots of proteas.

'Eventually, one day you can have a museum of proteas to be able to say, "This is what they looked like". There won't be much scientific value to the world because there won't be any DNA to work with, but we've got the shapes of proteas that are dying because of global warming, that won't grow again. The same for orchids. There are over 300 species in the Cape alone. I'd like to capture that, have them as a collection, and construct a building, the Cape Orchid Museum, with another wing for the Natal Orchids. We've got 6 000 plant species in the Cape alone to play with. I've maybe covered 400 thus far. That's taken 12 years. I'm 43 now, I've got what ... 30 years to go?

'These plants might not be here in 200 years' time. There was an amazing photo of a house where everything was burnt to cinders. The only thing left in the house was a bronze sculpture. That's what could happen with these plants. I'm making metal fossils.'

nicbladen.com

TEXT: TUDOR CARADOC-DAVIES/BUREAUX, PRODUCTION: SVEN ALBERDING/BUREAUX, PHOTOS: WARREN HEATH/BUREAUX

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For your Home and Garden!

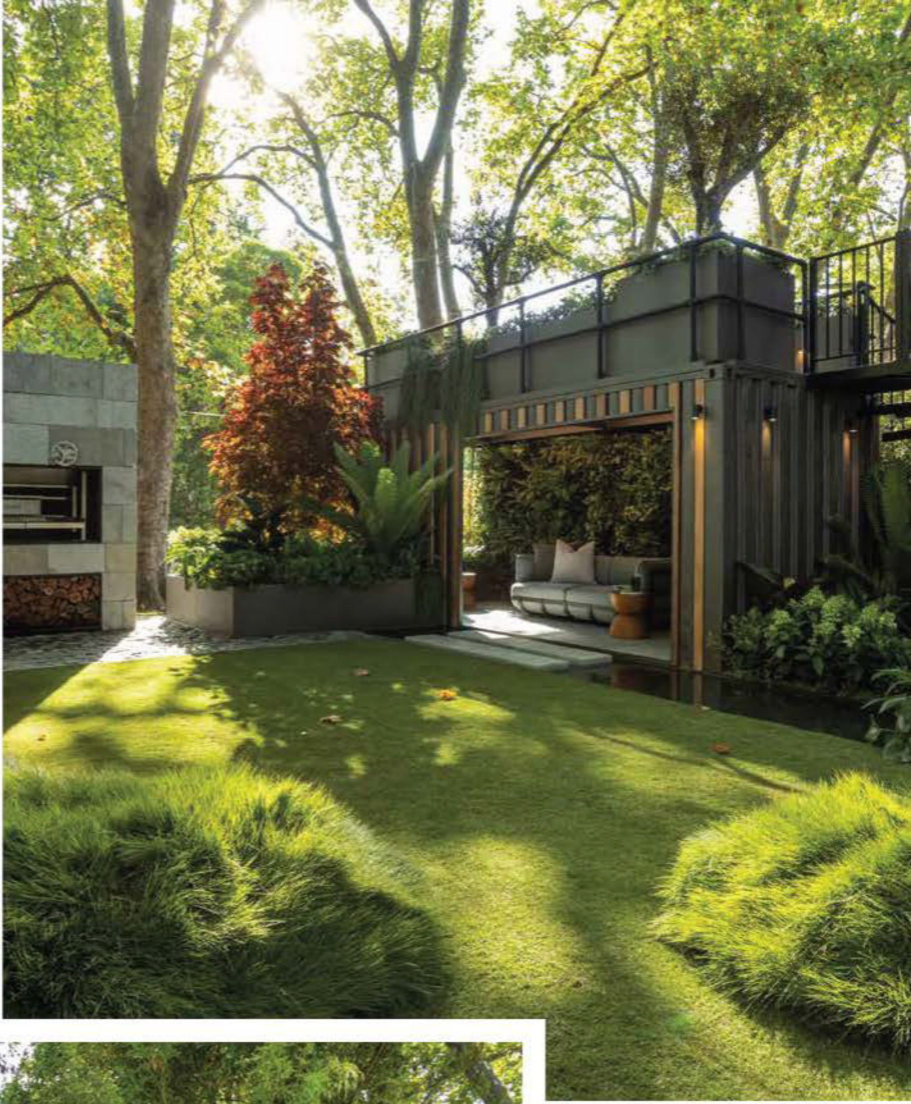
THE GREAT OUTDOORS

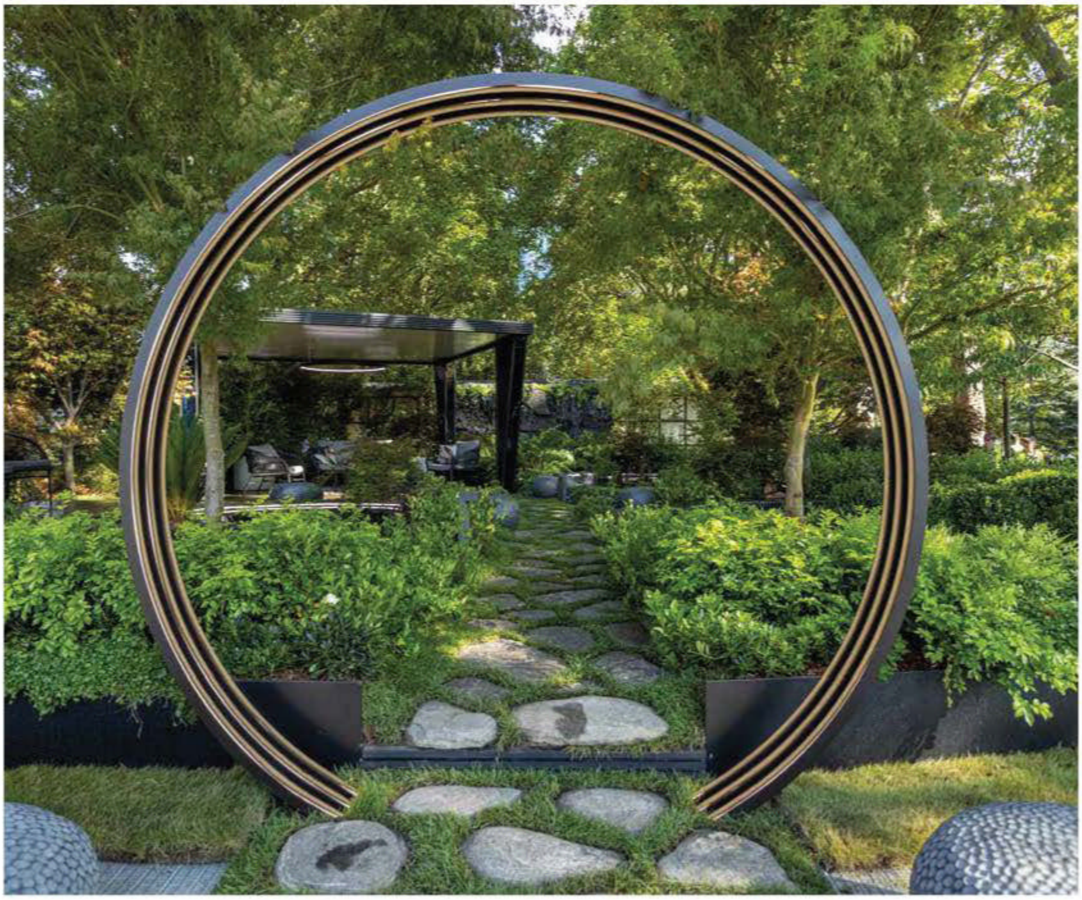
This year's Melbourne International Flower and Garden Show provides plenty of inspiration for South African gardeners with a love for outdoor living

BY SUSANNA PARKER

Every year at the end of March, the Carlton Gardens in Melbourne is transformed into a magical display of landscaped gardens, plants and features. Then the Victorian Royal Exhibition Building is filled with cut flowers for the start of the Melbourne International Flower and Garden Show. The show features the best garden design and floral art talent Australia has to offer, alongside international artists, for five days of garden shopping, workshops, entertainment and food to delight everyone, young and retired.

Of special interest to gardeners are the show gardens that artfully bring together ideas and inspiration we can all use in our own gardens. Much of the plant material used in Australian designs comes from our country and any others can easily be substituted because of our similar climates. Australian designers are passionate about lifestyle in the great outdoors (like we are) and this certainly shows in these creations. Here are some of the features we loved.





↑ Greener Grass

The tranquil lawn with circles of 'free' grass created mounds of green.

← Shape and Form

The moon gate leads to the garden via the stepping stone outlined-in-grass walkway.

Container Garden

Container living is becoming more popular by the day, but these big metal boxes don't come with a big aesthetic. The best and most valuable way to link containers is to build a garden. The designers of this garden even won the coveted Best on Show award for their design. The focus of this design was the use of the outdoor space as the area most utilised for entertaining, relaxing, cooking and spending quality time with friends and family. Mission accomplished!

Art Deco Glamour

Gold is not often a colour associated with garden design and yet in this instance it works so well, it's a wonder we haven't used it before. Using the contemporary design principles of form, texture, pattern and colour, this design recognises the appeal of Hollywood's golden age but with a fresh look. The climate-conscious plants surrounding this platform of elegance are tough, reliable and need minimal attention throughout the year. This garden received several awards at the show including Gold, Best Construction and the People's Choice Award.

Low Maintenance

→

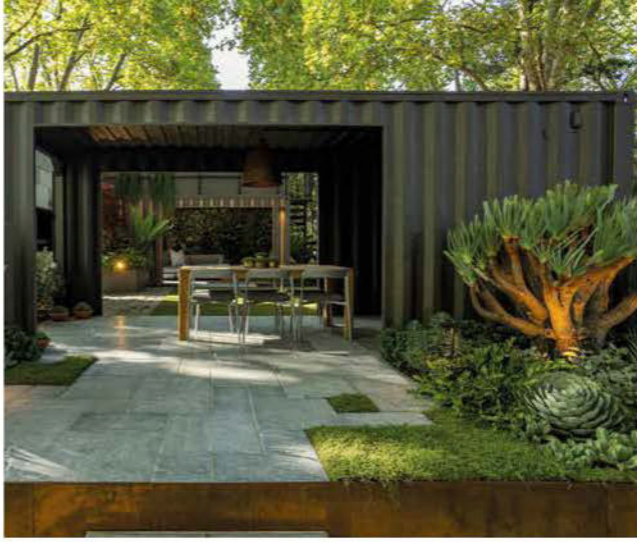
Lighting for the small *Kumara plicatilis* trees are placed on either side of the walkway giving the design night-time value, and turning the large *Agave potatorum* on the right into a structural focal point.

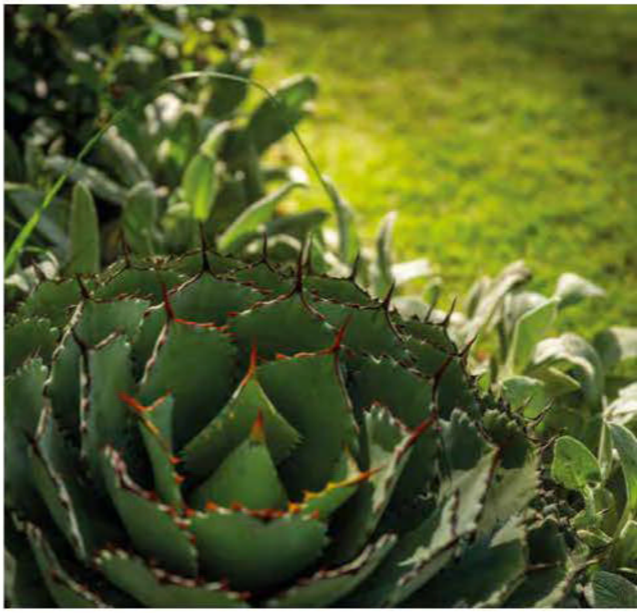
Sweet Succulents ↘

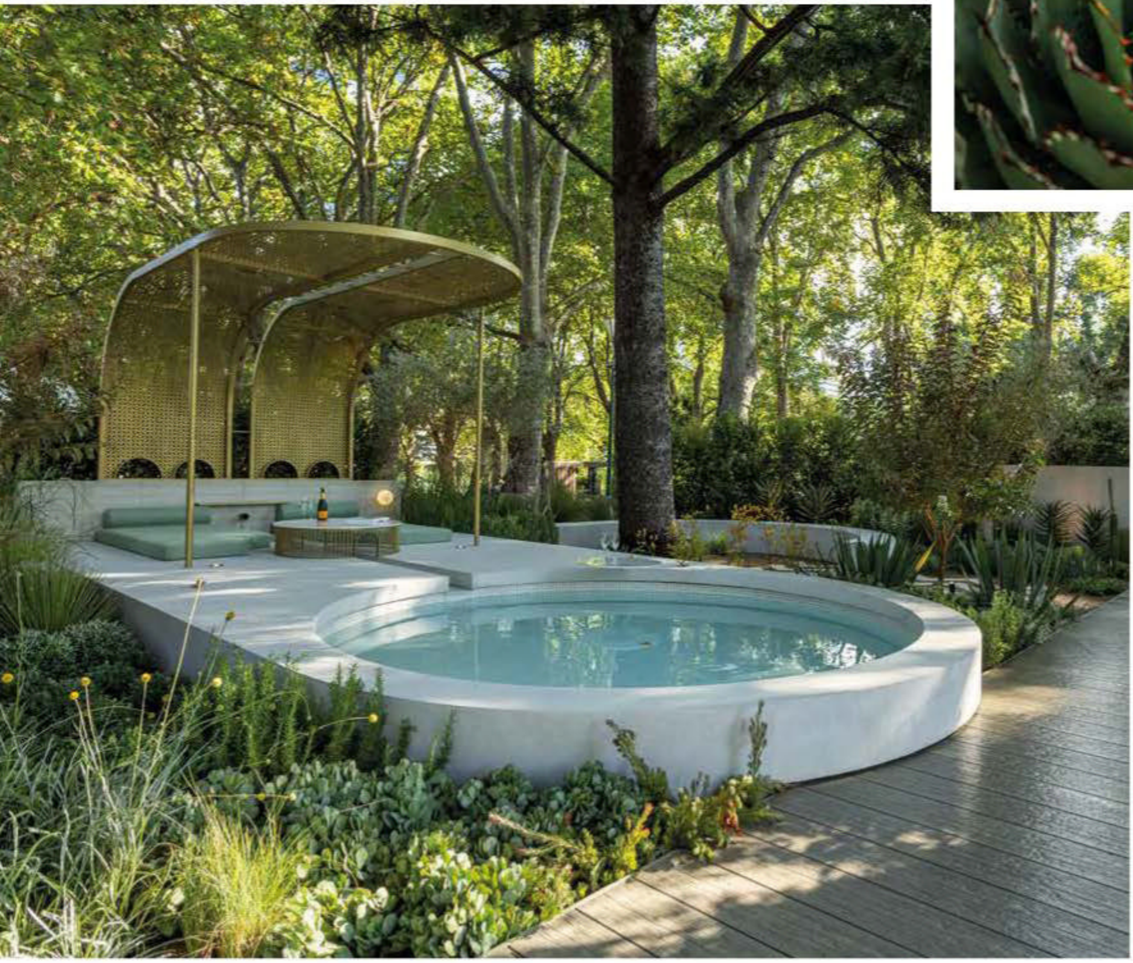
These succulents and hardy perennials look good all year round.

↓ Design Love

We loved the attention to detail in the design, especially of the retro table that arches over the water rill.

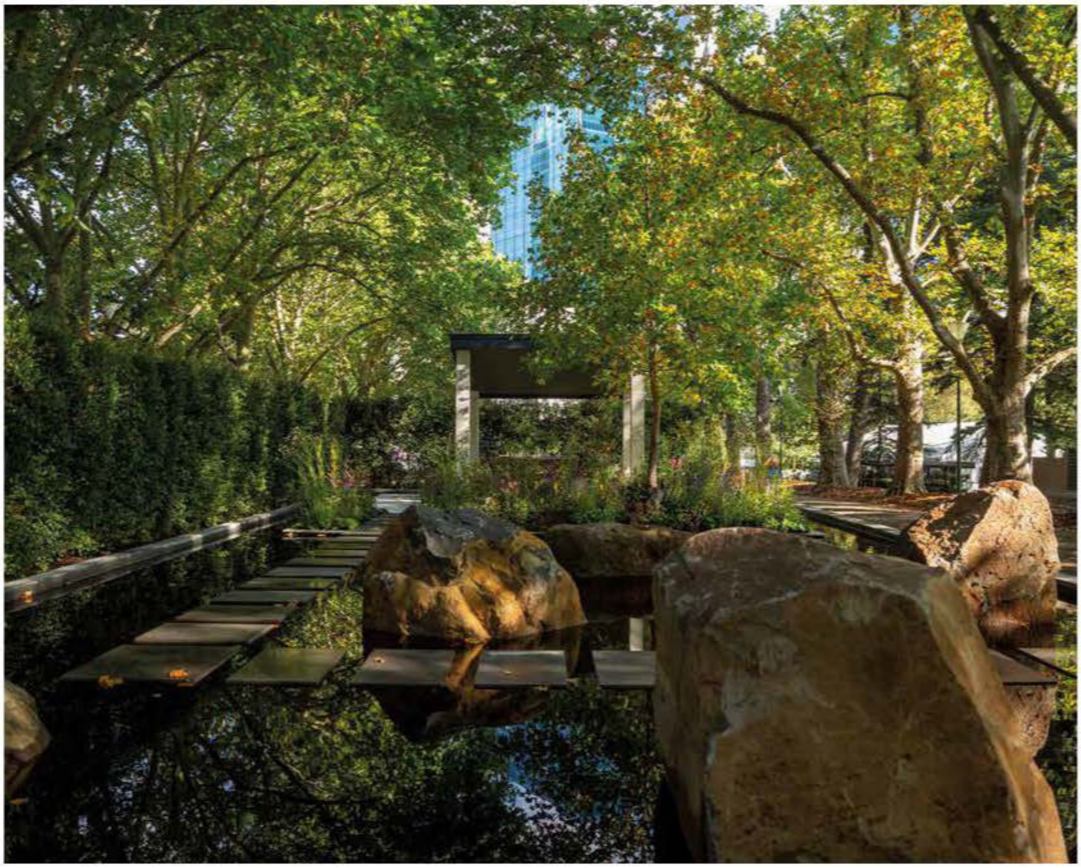






Local Succulent Tree

Kumara plicatilis, (previously *Aloe plicatilis*) is commonly called the fan aloe because of its unusual succulent leaves in the shape of a fan atop textural branches. This is a perfect feature plant picked out at night with lighting. This small tree grows to around 3 m high and is endemic to the Western Cape in a limited region around Franschhoek. It makes a good pot plant in a sunny position in soil with good drainage. If grown outside the Cape area it needs watering in winter and spring and cover from heavy frost.



← Shady Haven

The covered pavilion is surrounded by placid water, and the rock table ties the area into the design.

Feature Trees

Instead of the tulip tree in this design, why not use a South African superstar tree *Dais cotinifolia* (pompon tree)? This is a small tree also suitable for small gardens that flower with an abundance of pink flowers in spring.

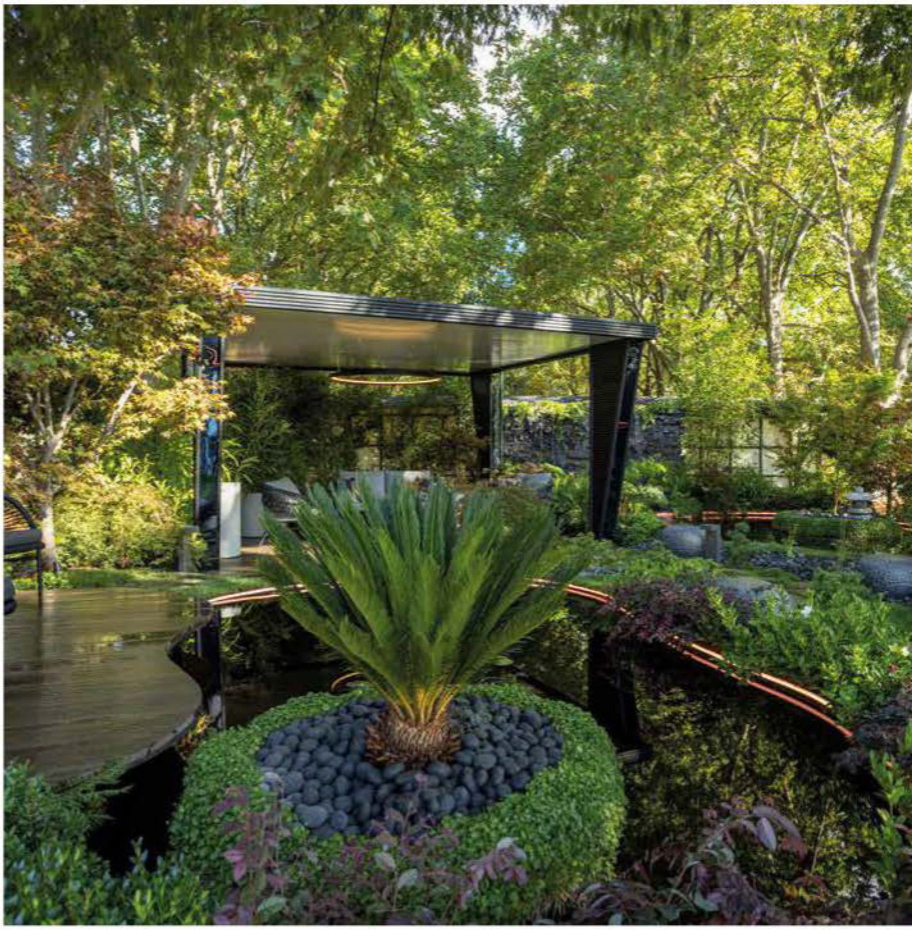
> *If you look the right way, you can see that the whole world is a garden*
>
> – FRANCES HODGSON BURNETT

Stone Garden

The use of giant boulders makes this design unique. The idea is to mimic a rocky coastline and then move into an area of tranquillity under a feature tree, in this case a tulip tree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*), underplanted with a mass of bright-flowering perennials.

Complex Composition

This composition is a study in grey and black that blends together in a complex series of shapes, interspersed with lush green plants. Pools lined in black reflect the greenery and the gunmetal grey manmade and natural shapes. An intriguing design that works.

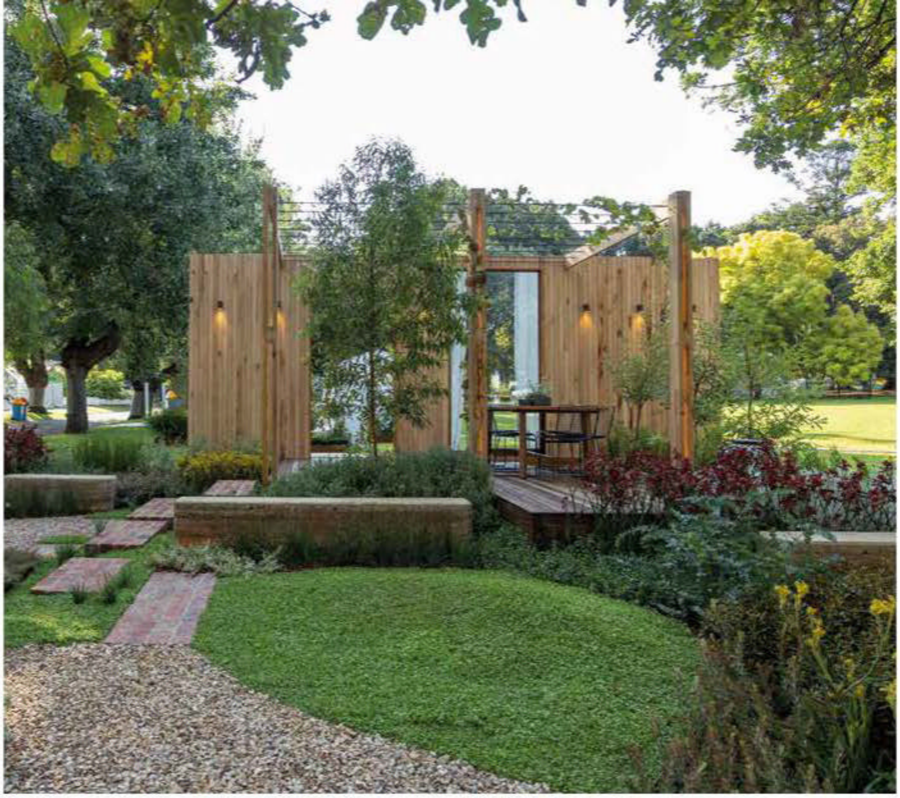


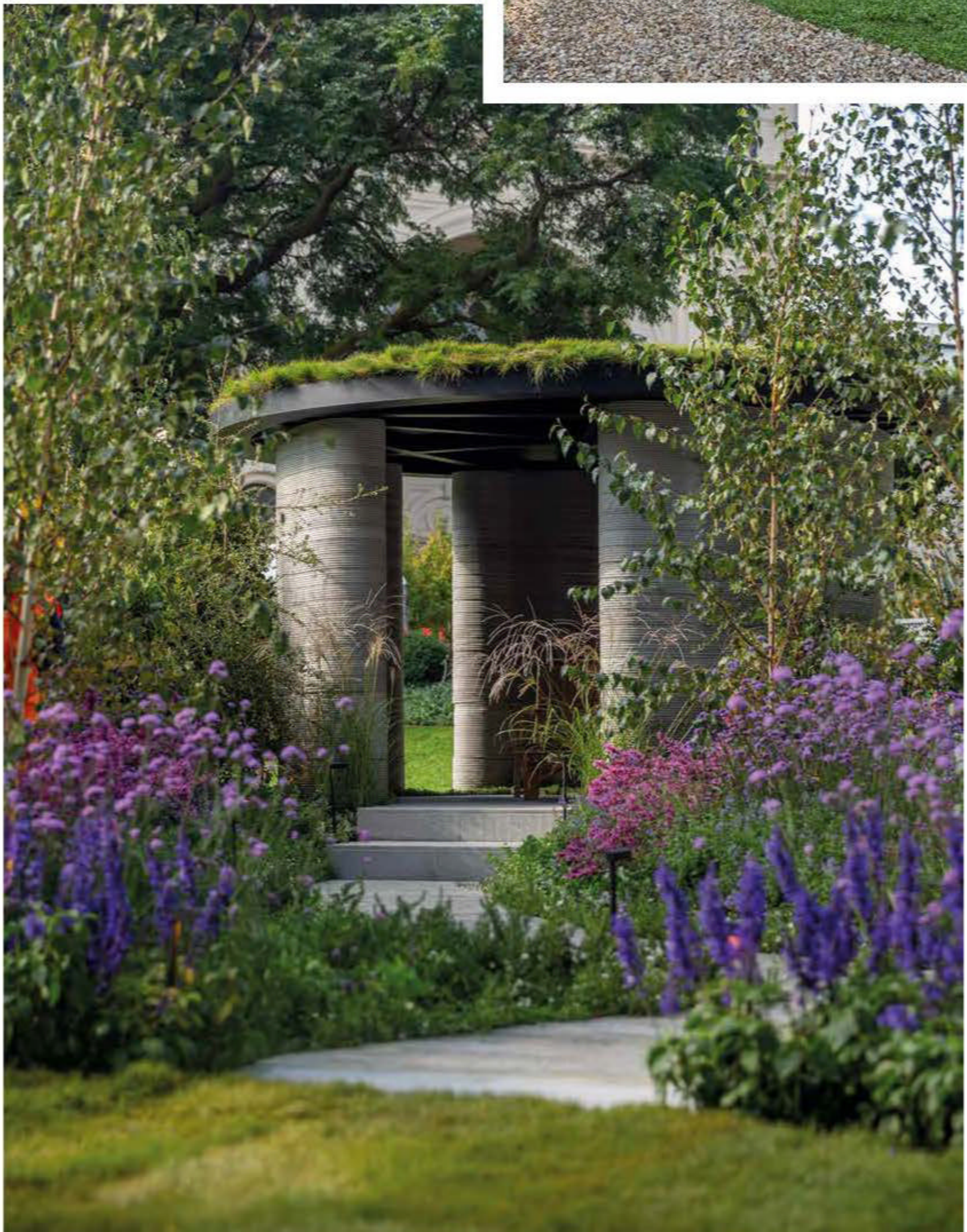
Much About Materials

A garden that was created using various levels and lots of different materials, such as reclaimed wood, recycled brick, gravel and rammed earth walls. The designers wanted a small carbon footprint and so the plants are all local with the intention of inviting in a range of insects and wildlife.

Futuristic Pods

This futuristic garden was inspired by the shape of lunaria seed pods and how the light was diffused in them. The pods – the living spaces – were constructed using 3D printed-concrete. The green roofs allow the pods to seamlessly blend with the natural environment and all the areas of the garden connect with pathways.





↑ Plant Choice

The areas of *Dichondra repens* (Wonder Lawn) were used as a lawn substitute.

← Garden Tech

We loved the use of a very modern construction tool – 3D printing to construct the pod supports. In South Africa the University of Johannesburg is conducting studies on the viability of using 3D concrete construction in housing, analysing the viability and costs involved.

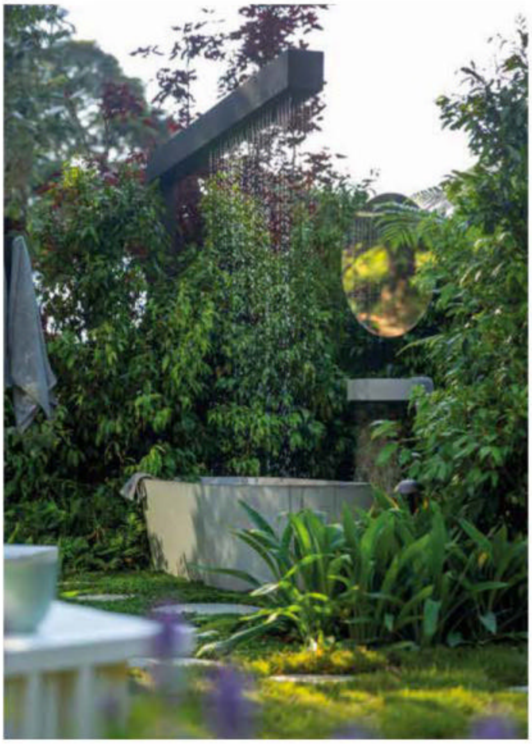
Outdoor Living →

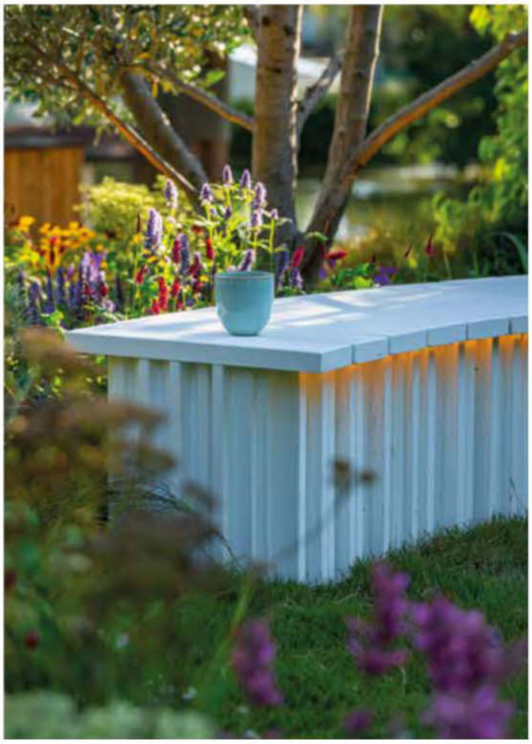
The linear fire pit on the patio will keep guests warm in the winter, cosy in the summer and is marshmallow-ready. The underlit benches make this garden useful at night when you can project a movie onto the big built-in screen.

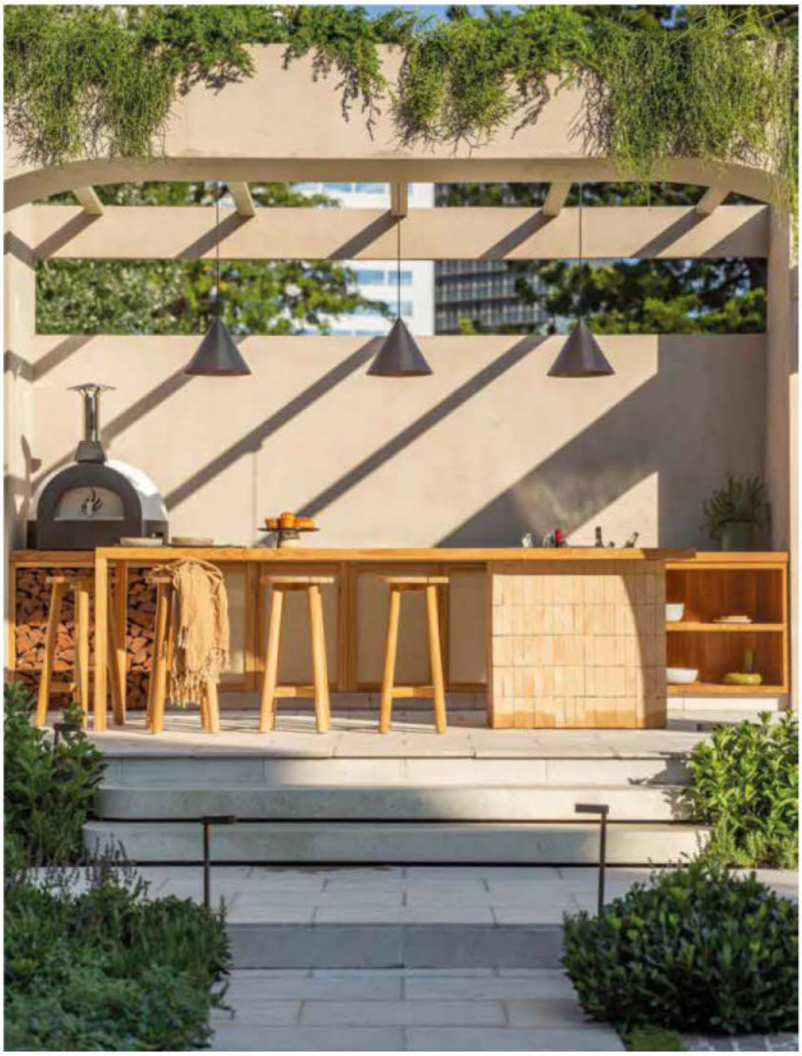
↓ Contrast

The drapery of plants softens the hard structure.

For more information on the show visit ***melbflowershow.com.au***







PHOTOS: MELBOURNE INTERNATIONAL FLOWER AND GARDEN SHOW

> “
> *This garden is all about the little things in life*

Positivity of Life

This garden is all about the little things in life. The things that make people smile, that make you feel warm and happy and spoilt for a little while. The garden is about pampering the body and the soul, and its construction was mindfully done using materials like natural stones and long-lasting flowering perennials were planted. The finishing touches include a ready-to-use outdoor kitchen with braai, sink and storage, an outdoor shower and a projector screen to the side with seating arranged on the lawn.

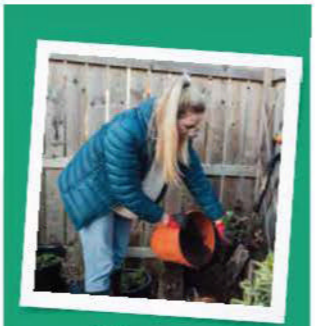
Villa of Dreams

This garden is named Villa du Lusso (aka Luxurious Villa) and is inspired by a Mediterranean elegant style. It’s a dream summer entertaining garden with a pool and outdoor living pavilion with plenty of space to eat, and even a pizza oven. A hideaway that would fit in any place in the world.

In The Garden

June Garden To-Dos

Tackle these chores in the cooler winter months



Keep Warm Outdoors

Those in colder regions of the country may find it tough to head out to the garden when temperatures dip. But some things can make the process a little more bearable. Firstly, wear layers of clothing that can be easily added or removed as needed. A base layer made of breathable material, such as wool or synthetic fibres, can help wick away moisture and keep you dry. On top of that, wear a warm and insulating layer, such as a fleece or down jacket. A windproof and waterproof outer layer can help protect you from the elements. Additionally, wear warm and waterproof gloves to protect your hands and keep them dry. Insulated boots or shoes with good traction can help prevent slips and falls on icy or wet surfaces. If it's particularly cold, consider wearing a hat or beanie to keep your head warm. Take frequent breaks and warm up indoors as needed. A hot cup of tea or soup can also help warm you up from the inside. And remember to stay hydrated, as it's easy to forget to drink water when it's cold outside.

WE'RE PLANTING

Fruit Trees

There is still time to plant some fruit trees, allowing them to establish strong root systems before it gets too cold. Fruit trees typically need plenty of sun, so choose a planting location that receives at least six hours of direct sunlight per day. Plant in well-draining soil amended with compost to improve soil fertility and structure. Dig a hole that is twice as wide and just as deep as the root ball of the tree to give the roots plenty of room to spread out and establish themselves. Make sure the tree is planted at the same depth it was in the bag or container. Water deeply after planting to help settle the soil and remove any air pockets around the roots. Keep the soil evenly moist for the next few weeks, but not waterlogged to prevent rot. Add a layer of mulch around the base of the tree to help retain moisture, suppress weeds and insulate the soil. Young fruit trees may need support to keep them upright in windy conditions, so install a stake soon after planting to protect the tree during the initial stages of growth.

Tool Maintenance

→ **Clean your tools.** It's important to clean tools after use to prevent dirt and debris from accumulating and causing damage. Use a brush to remove soil and a damp cloth to wipe down the blades.

→ **Dry your tools thoroughly.** After cleaning your tools, be sure to dry them before storing them. Moisture can cause rust and corrosion.

→ **Oil your tools.** Applying a light coat of oil to the blades and metal parts of your tools can help prevent rust and keep them functioning smoothly.

→ **Sharpen your tools.** Dull tools are not only less effective, but they can also be dangerous to use. Sharpen your tools regularly to help keep them in good shape.

→ **Store your tools properly.** When not in use, store your tools in a dry, clean place. Hanging them up on a pegboard or storing in a toolbox can protect them from damage and keep them organised.

THE ESSENTIALS

Lawn Care

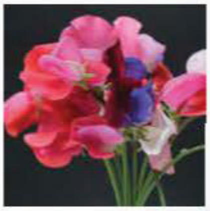
In winter, grass grows slower than in warmer months, meaning far less mowing. Adjust your mowing schedule to accommodate this slower growth to help prevent damage to your lawn. Keep the grass slightly longer than you would during the summer to protect the roots and provide insulation. Keep your lawn clean and free of debris to prevent pests from making a home there. If you want to help some beneficial insects, keep a small patch of your garden full of any branches and leaves for them to hide out in away from the cold. Applying a slow-release fertiliser to your lawn in late autumn can help promote healthy root growth and ensure that your lawn has the nutrients it needs to survive the winter months. Avoid walking on your lawn if the soil is wet or frozen to prevent any damage and browning.

IN THE EDIBLE GARDEN

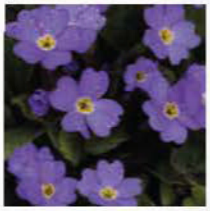
In many areas of the country where temperatures dip quickly, your winter veg should already be planted. Now is the time to focus on care, including correct watering and feeding. Gardeners in subtropical areas can still plant cabbage, cauliflower, onions and other cool-season vegetables. For an easy-to-grow edible garden option, plant broad beans now before temperatures drop too low. With the right support and regular care, just one plant will produce more beans than you know what to do with in the kitchen. Regularly check your brassicas for signs of pest problems – particularly aphids – and tackle them before they become almost impossible to remove. Harvest apples and pears and consider preserving any extra fruits you may not use or share them with neighbours and family. There is still time to plant berries too for harvesting the following year.

Winter Blooms

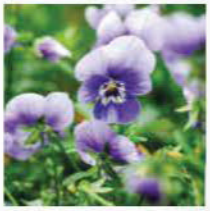
Plant these cool-season flowers to brighten up your winter garden



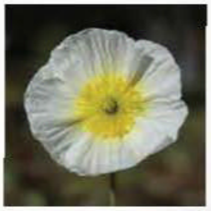
Sweet peas
Fragrant flowers in shades of pink, purple and white are a popular choice for winter planting. They can be grown from seed and add a lovely scent to your garden.



Primulas
Known for their delicate and fragrant blooms, which come in shades of pink, red, purple and white. They can thrive in both sun and shade, making them versatile.

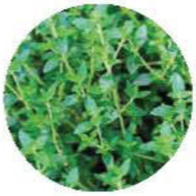


Violas
Compact, colourful flowers that are great for planting in containers or garden beds. They come in a range of colours and can tolerate cooler temperatures without trouble.

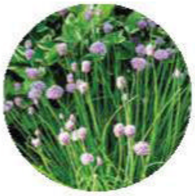


Iceland poppies
Delicate, papery petals that come in shades of yellow, orange, pink and white. They prefer cool temperatures and add a beautiful touch to your winter garden.

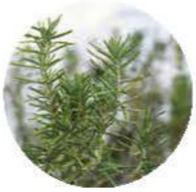
Winter Herbs



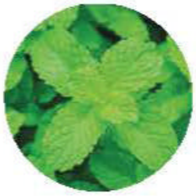
Thyme



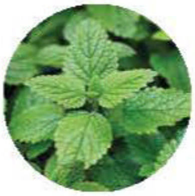
Chives



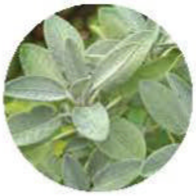
Rosemary



Mint

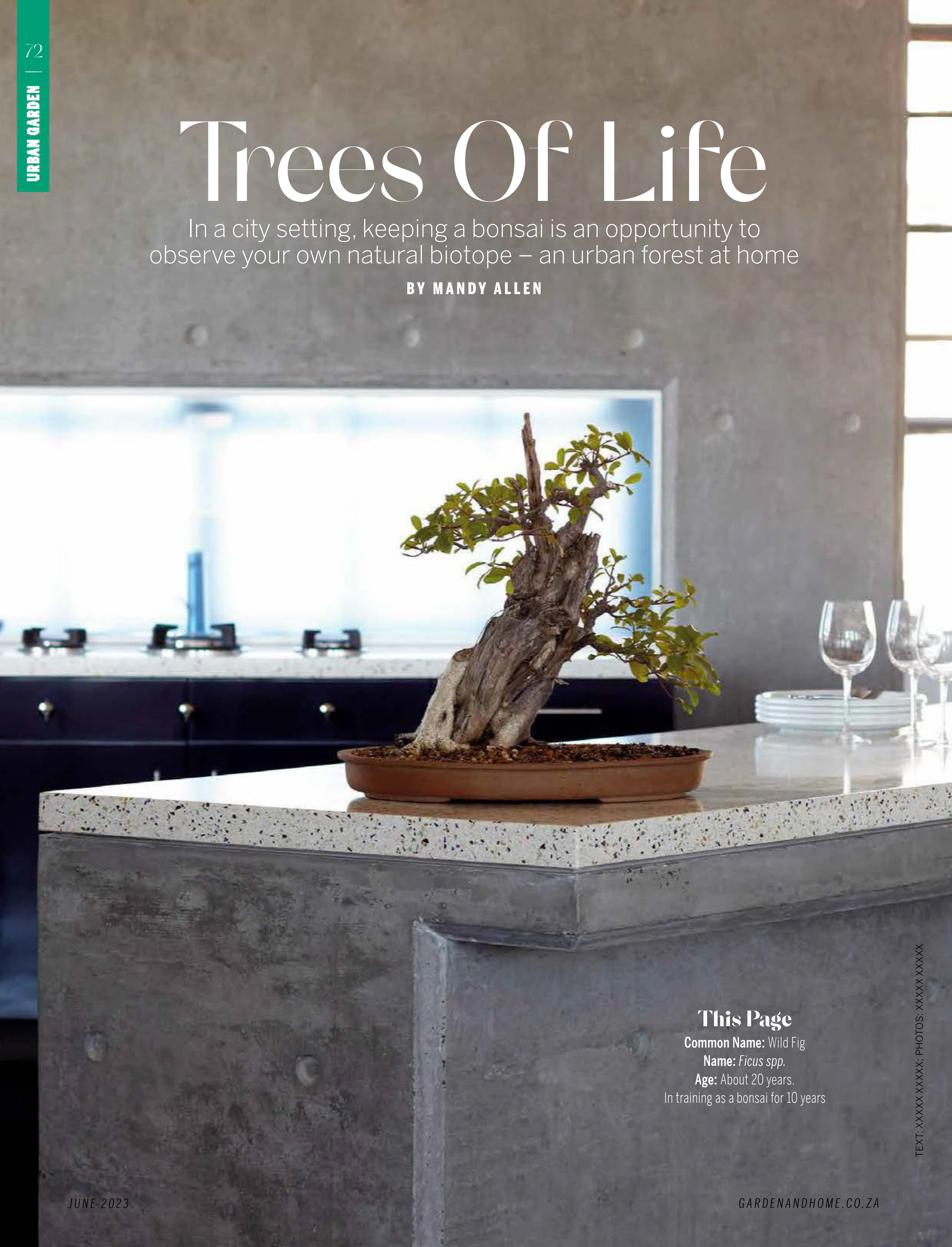


Lemon balm



Sage

TEXT: G&H TEAM; PHOTOS: GALLO/GETTYIMAGES, UNSPLASH, COURTESY IMAGES



Trees Of Life

In a city setting, keeping a bonsai is an opportunity to observe your own natural biotope – an urban forest at home

BY MANDY ALLEN

This Page

Common Name: Wild Fig
Name: *Ficus spp.*
Age: About 20 years.
In training as a bonsai for 10 years

TEXT: XXXXX XXXXX; PHOTOS: XXXXX XXXXX

At its most basic definition, bonsai is the Japanese practice of growing and shaping living, small-scale trees in shallow containers. But with a history that spans over 1 000 years and an intriguing plant lore that tells of monks and emperors, samurais and shoguns, artists and scholars, the passion that bonsai evokes in its more dedicated followers is said to inspire an almost spiritual devotion – far deeper than simply tending to a plant in a pot.

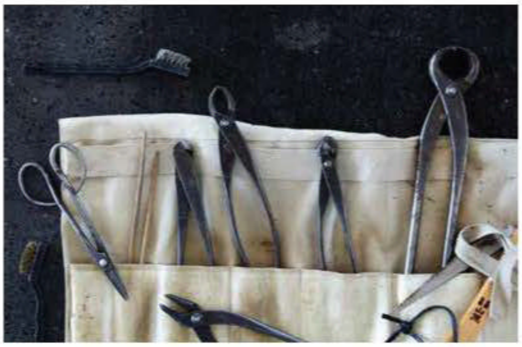
And then there are the bonsai themselves: mesmerising miniature versions of a wide variety of species from juniper and ficus to bougainvillaea and pine, every trunk, branch and leaf strangely surreal in its perfect resemblance to its larger counterpart. For most of us, at first glance, it would be easier to believe that these were set pieces created for an upcoming Tim Burton movie, complete with resident forest sprites, than actual trees.

In recent years, bonsai has spread its roots from being the exclusive domain of specialist horticulturalists and serious hobbyists to becoming a part of our mainstream culture and lifestyles. Who could forget actor Pat Morita as Mr Miyagi, carefully tending to his bonsai collection in *The Karate Kid*, or the bonsai logo on the gi worn by Ralph Macchio as Daniel-san in this iconic movie? Now, even a trip to the supermarket for milk can result in a bonsai purchase, allowing absolute beginners to indulge in a relaxing pastime with satisfying aesthetic results. While most bonsai will do best outdoors, requiring the strong light that they do, because they are easily portable they can be brought indoors as the focus

> “
> *The passion that bonsai evokes is said to inspire an almost spiritual devotion*

↑ **Above**
Common Name: Chinese Maple
Name: *Acer buergerianum*
Age: About 40 years. In training as a bonsai for 17 years.

Right →
Moss in a bonsai container

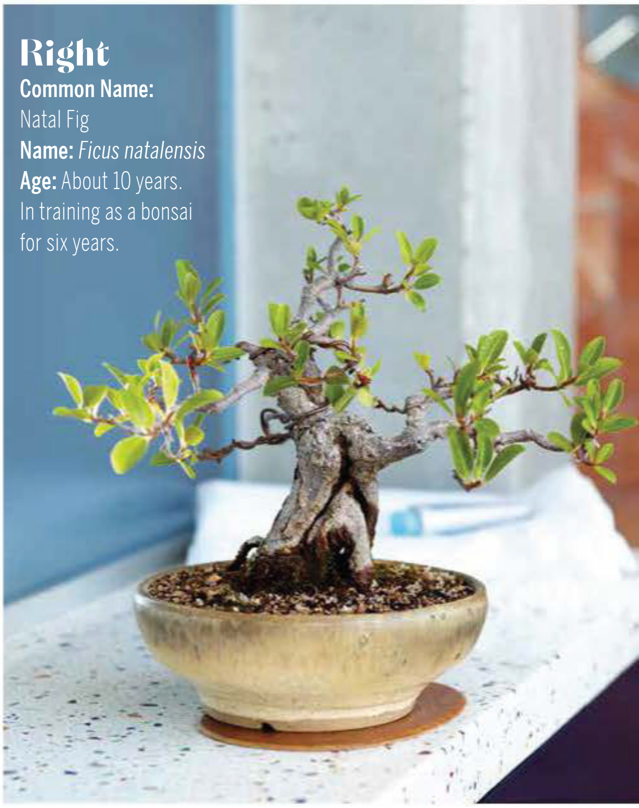


← Left

As a beginner, you need nothing more than a pair of small scissors, secateurs and a few brushes to grow your trees but if you become passionate about the hobby, these tools are needed to achieve good results. Here are soft brushes for cleaning the bark, hard brushes for the deadwood, scissors, saws, wire cutters, chopsticks, pliers and a selection of cutters that are used on roots, branches and for hollowing out previously cut sections.

↓ Below

Fire escapes make a perfect spot for bonsai.



Right

Common Name: Natal Fig

Name: *Ficus natalensis*

Age: About 10 years.

In training as a bonsai for six years.

> ❝
>
> *You need nothing more than a pair of small secateurs and a few brushes*

of a contemporary display or decorative installation. Any balcony, fire escape or even outdoor window sill create a good home-away-from-home for those while others are suitable for permanent indoor positions too.

The best trees for indoor growth are those that can survive the sometimes harsh conditions found inside – directional light that can be too hot or too little light. The following species are recommended for indoor plantings:

- Natal fig (*Ficus natalensis*)
- Tree of a thousand stars (*Serissa foetida*)
- Monkey thorn (*Senegalia galpinii*)
- Bauhinia (*Bauhinia natalensis* and *B. tomentosa*)
- Spekboom (*Portulacaria afra*)
- Crassula (*Crassula spp.*)
- Bladdernut (*Diospyros whyteana*)
- Kei apple (*Dovyalis caffra*)

Right →

Common Name: Swamp Cypress or Bald Cypress
Name: *Taxodium distichum*
Age: About 30 years.
In training as a bonsai for six years.

↓ Below

Common Name: Japanese Maple
Name: *Acer palmatum*
Age: About 30 years.
In training as a bonsai for six years.

TEXT: MANDY ALLEN, SVEN ALBERDING/BUREAUX; PRODUCTION: SVEN ALBERDING/BUREAUX; PHOTOS: WARREN HEATH/BUREAUX

BONSAI GROWING TIPS

Light

- Position your bonsai close to a window to receive bright light, possibly some morning sun too. Avoid hot afternoon sun.
- Since light from windows comes from one direction it's important you rotate your tree by a quarter to half every week. This will ensure an evenly distributed growth pattern.

Humidity

- Since interior conditions are often quite dry, it is recommended to place the tree in a drip tray that's filled with coarse sand or gravel.
- Ensure the pot of your bonsai is above the water level of the drip tray at all times.
- Misting your tree daily also helps to increase humidity.

Watering

- It's better to saturate the soil of your bonsai and then wait for it to dry up a little than constantly watering it.
- Your tray should always be moist but never be soggy-wet.
- If you find your tree too dry, dunking it in a basin of water for a few minutes and then letting excess water run off is recommended.

Feeding

- Your tree will enjoy being fed once a month.
- Any pot plant fertilisers can be used, just follow the instructions on the packet.

Pruning

- Allow the shoots to grow up to 6 to 8 leaves and then trim them back to the first two leaves.
- Repeating this results in the development of branch ramifications. If you want a certain area in the tree to develop more, you should leave this region to grow until it is as big as you want it and then you can start trimming the shoots back.

Beat the Winter Blues

Feeling as low as the winter temperatures this year? Boost your mood by interacting with nature and getting into the garden with these winter-friendly ideas

BY MADISON MOULTON

↙ Eat your Greens

Colourful veggies are packed with vitamins and minerals, perfect for cold winter dinners.

← Pop of Colour

Even though winter may seem devoid of colour, winter annuals can still brighten your backyard.

↓ Indoor Gardens

Indoor gardens boost mental health and wellness year-round, not just in winter.

Add Some Winter Colour

When everything around you feels gloomy and grey, a pop of colour is a quick way to boost your mood. That's where winter annuals come in. These blooms remain bright even when temperatures drop and are incredibly easy to grow. When the perennial stalwarts of your garden die down and don't look as good as they usually do, plants like snapdragons, sweet alyssum, Iceland poppies and petunias will save the day.

Get Active in the Edible Garden

Getting outdoors, even when temperatures are low, is an essential part of combating the winter blues. Being outside and interacting with nature is scientifically proven to improve mental health and well-being, especially during months when we spend much more time indoors. To keep up the gardening activity, spend some time in your vegetable garden with seasonal produce like brassicas, carrots, leeks and beetroot. As a bonus, these nutrient-packed veggies make great winter recipes and help you fight winter colds.

Grow Houseplants

If you don't have any outdoor garden space (or simply aren't ready to head outside in sub-zero temperatures), houseplants are your answer. Keeping plants indoors comes with the same

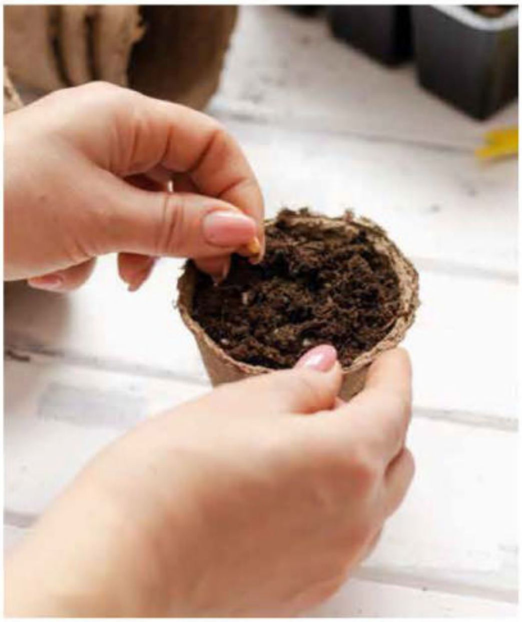
mood-boosting benefits as heading outside. But as an added bonus, you'll be surrounded by your houseplants all the time, along with your indoor comforts. Choose plants with pops of colour such as anthuriums for an extra lift.

Start an Indoor Herb Garden

Vegetables and fruits are notoriously difficult to grow indoors successfully. But there is one group of edibles you can grow inside with little effort – herbs. As long as you have a sunny windowsill to place the plants on (or a set of indoor grow lights if you don't), you can grow lush herbs even in the height of winter. Rosemary and thyme are hardy choices that pair well with winter dishes, although they do need plenty of direct sunlight to grow well indoors.

Living Art

To spruce up flower bouquets, add a few elements from your garden and trim the flower stems to create shape.



↖ Bursting with Flavour

An indoor herb garden is beneficial in any season, but especially in winter when it's too cold to head outside.

← Head Start

Sowing your own seeds allows you to control the conditions, producing the strongest seedlings that will be better adapted to your garden environment.

Treat Yourself to Fresh Flowers

When the flowers are lacking in your own garden, treat yourself to a bouquet of fresh flowers from your local florist. Seeing colourful flowers can stimulate positive emotions and improve your overall mood while also improving the freshness of your home. The scent of flowers has been shown to have a calming effect on the mind and can reduce stress levels. Keep them fresh by feeding with flower food and keeping them out of direct sunlight.

Sow Seeds Indoors

Later in the winter season, get a head start on spring growing by sowing seeds indoors. Around 4–6 weeks before you plan on planting in spring, grab a heating mat and some grow lights and sow your seeds in trays inside. Not only does this extend your season by getting your seedlings in the ground as soon as possible, but it also allows you to get your hands dirty and let off some gardening steam without bracing the cold.

Visit Your Local Nursery

To get your creative juices flowing, there's nothing better than strolling through your local nursery. Whether you're looking for new ideas or want to spend a day out in nature, nurseries are the place to be. As fewer people garden in the winter months, the extra support during these down times will be a great benefit to your favourite garden destination.

Plan New Garden Projects

Once you've got some new ideas from your local nursery visit, put them to good use by planning your spring garden. Drumming up excitement for new projects will help you look forward to spring and makes you more organised in the process.

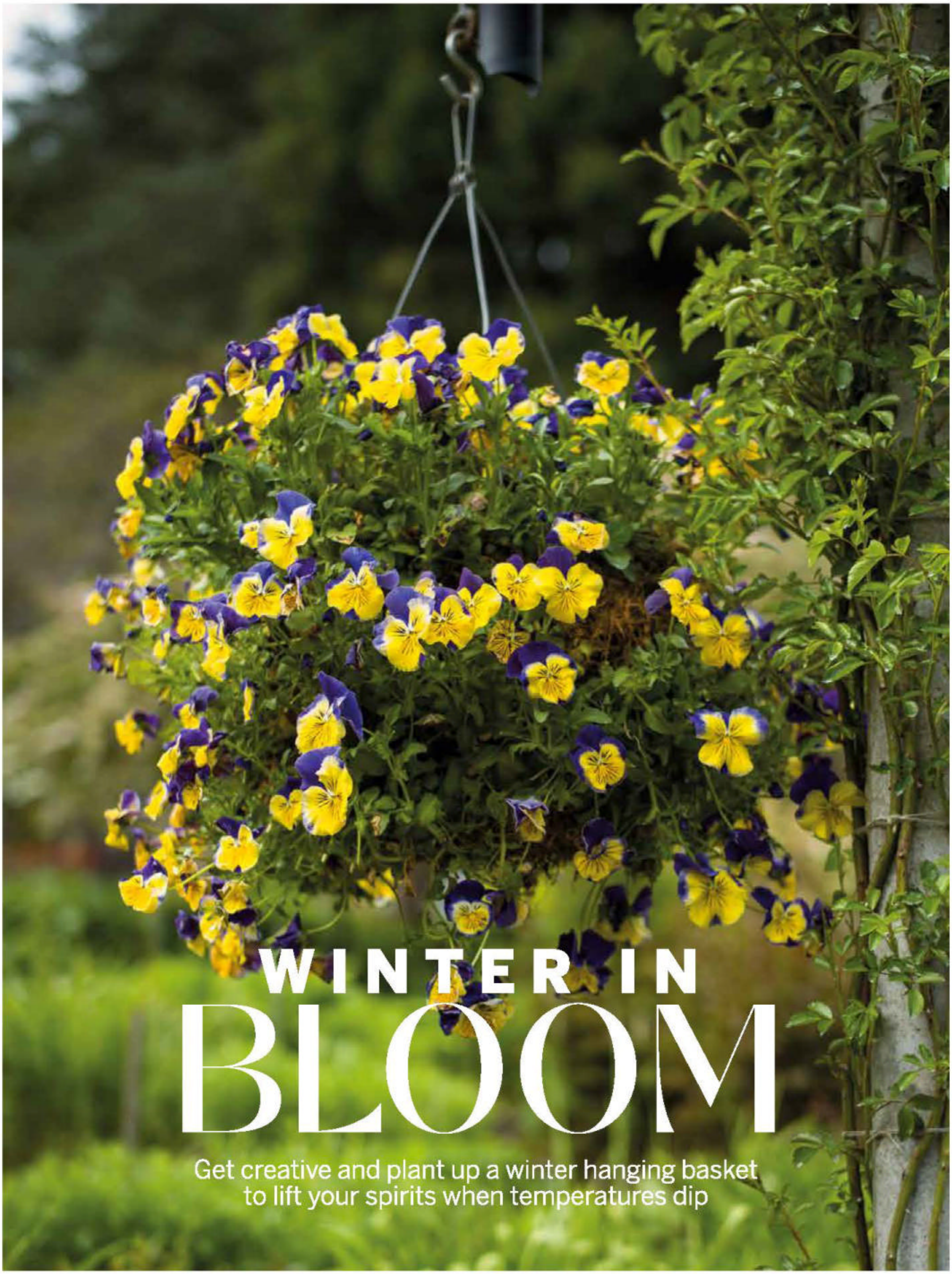
↑ **Explore Local**

There is nothing better than strolling through a nursery to look for some garden inspiration.

← **Get Planning**

Getting creative and coming up with new garden ideas is the best way to start the spring season.

PHOTOS: GALLO/GETTYIMAGES; UNSPLASH



WINTER IN BLOOM

Get creative and plant up a winter hanging basket to lift your spirits when temperatures dip

TEXT: MADISON MOULTON; PHOTOS: GALLO/GETTYIMAGES, SHUTTERSTOCK

STEPS

1 | Select a hanging basket that is the appropriate size for the number of plants you want to grow. It should have drainage holes and a hook or chain for hanging.

2 | Choose winter annuals that have similar light and water requirements to plant in the same container. Good options for winter hanging baskets include pansies, violas and lobelia.

3 | Fill the basket with good-quality potting soil, leaving enough space at the top for the plants. Press down gently to remove any air pockets.

4 | Decide on a planting arrangement before you start planting. Proper preparation will ensure each plant has enough space to fill out over time. Start with the largest or tallest plants in the centre and work your way outwards. This is your chance to get creative and come up with a unique design and placement.

5 | Make holes in the soil to carefully plant by gently teasing the roots. Plant at the same depth as the plants were in their original containers.

6 | Water the basket thoroughly and add slow-release fertiliser according to package instructions. Continue to water and fertilise as needed throughout the winter.

7 | Once the basket is planted, hang it in a suitable location that receives the appropriate amount of light for the plants you have chosen.

Snapdragon

If you're looking for a winter-friendly annual for beds rather than baskets, try snapdragons.

81/1000
CHILDREN BORN
IN AFRICA IN **2015** DIED BEFORE AGE 5

5 children under 5 years of age dying every minute

2/3 DEATHS ARE PREVENTABLE

1/3 OF DEATHS ARE IN THE NEONATAL PERIOD

THE RED CROSS CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL IS A BEACON OF HOPE IN AFRICA

IT MANAGES **260 000** PATIENT VISITS EACH YEAR

1/3 of Red Cross Children's Hospital patients are UNDER THE AGE OF 1

THE CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL TRUST has fundraised for the Hospital since 1994

The Trust has raised over **R678m** since inception

The only specialized dedicated burns unit in Africa

Only surgical skills training centre of its kind in sub-Saharan Africa

Only **2%** of registered nurses in Southern Africa are trained in paediatrics

THE TRUST HAS HELPED FUND THE TRAINING OF OVER **300** AFRICAN DOCTORS AND NURSES

These trained paediatric specialists take their skills back into African countries

Clinical research at the Hospital has influenced global **WHO guidelines**

OVER **R100m** WAS RAISED IN **2016** FOR AFRICA'S LARGEST **PAEDIATRIC ICU**

SAVING LIVES of children from all over Africa

Help the Children's Hospital Trust Give Back Childhood.

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The Children's Hospital Trust
Giving Back Childhood

LIFESTYLE

PHOTO: UNSPLASH

HOT TOPIC

COSY UP

Despite the chill, winter is a season full of magic and wonder – think gentle fires and snow selfies. It's also the best time of year to get stuck into a chunky read, experiment with a new recipe or escape to a snug cabin...

- If you don't already have lemons in your garden, get planting and enjoy the benefits of having their zesty juice on hand – including a healthy dose of Vitamin C.
- Craving comfort food? Hearty meals needn't mean hours in front of the stove. Dust off your instant cooker or air fryer and prepare your favourite cut of meat for some easy, inspired cooking.
- Book the mountain getaway of your dreams and indulge in fireside conversation, white-washed views and all the blankets!

'In seed time learn, in harvest time teach, in winter enjoy'
– William Blake

Lemon Aid

Lemon trees are a beautiful addition to any garden, providing an abundance of healthy and delicious fruit for our kitchens

BY JANE GRIFFITHS

JANE GRIFFITHS EXPERT CORNER

Jane's Lemon Tips

When life gives you abundant lemons – don't waste them. Freeze the juice in ice cube trays. Zest the skin and freeze. Cut up the peels and infuse them in vinegar to make an all-purpose cleaner.

janesdeliciousshop.co.za

Lemons grow in most gardens in South Africa except for those where the temperatures drop below -5°C. In these areas, grow them in containers and move them to a warm, sheltered area during winter.

Varieties

Ideal for small gardens is the hardy Meyer. Its round fruit has juicy, dark-yellow flesh that's sweeter than most lemons. The Eureka, which tolerates mild frost, has oval, tart fruit with a nipple on the flower end and roughish, light-yellow skin. Very similar to the Eureka, the hardier, thornier Lisbon's fruit has smoother, thinner skin.

The oldest variety in South Africa is the Cape rough skin. Brought from St Helena, it was planted in the Cape Town Gardens in 1654. A very hardy lemon, its oval fruit has thick, bumpy skin. The sweet yet tart flesh is ideal for lemonade.

Planting

In the garden: Lemons like full sun and well-drained soil. In frost-prone areas, choose a warm, sheltered spot. Dig a hole twice the size of the tree's planting bag and add well-rotted compost and a couple of handfuls of Talborne Organics Vita Grow 2:3:2 fertiliser (to promote good root development). Position the tree at the same height as it was in the bag and fill in the hole. Water deeply and then again every week for the first month. Maintaining a consistent watering schedule will provide a strong root foundation to support later growth and fruiting.

In containers: Choose a large pot and fill it with a well-draining mixture of compost, vermiculite and cocopeat mixed with Vita Grow. Raise the container slightly off the ground with bricks to increase drainage and airflow.

Watering and Feeding

In the garden: A good general rule is to water more in spring and summer and cut back in autumn and winter. Feeding improves the harvest and helps prevent pests. Apply Vita Grow once a year for root conditioning, followed by Vita Fruit & Flower 3:1:5 every four months. Mulch well to suppress weeds and retain moisture.

In containers: Feed every three months and water three times a week in summer and twice a week in winter. Keep the soil slightly on the dry side, as they are susceptible to rot.

Pruning

Lemons benefit from dead, spindly or tangled branches being pruned to let more light penetrate or to shape the tree. Prune after the tree has finished fruiting. Remove any unproductive water shoots growing from below the graft (a bulge at the base of the tree). Prune container lemons to encourage a compact bushy shape.

Pests and Diseases

The most common pests to attack lemons are aphids and citrus psylla. This tiny scale pest sucks juice from under leaves, making them bumpy and curled. To control them, spray the leaves, tree trunk and the soil around the tree with Biogrow Pyrol.

Harvesting and Using

Fruit can take six to eight months to ripen to a mature yellow. Undamaged fruit will store for several weeks in the fridge. Lemons have multiple uses in the kitchen. Full of vitamin C they make a delicious drink. A squeeze of lemon added to a dish at the end of cooking brightens and enhances other flavours.

Lemon juice rubbed on fruit or vegetables prevents them from turning brown. Lemon pips are full of pectin, which makes jam and jellies jell. When using fruit low in pectin, gather pips in a muslin bag (or tea infuser) and immerse this in the jam or jelly while cooking to help it set. And of course, a gin and tonic is not ready to drink without a slice of lemon in it!

PHOTOS: JANE GRIFFITHS AND KEITH KNOWLTON

A CUT *Above*

Winter tends to bring on cravings for more meaty meals and creative ways to get hearty satisfaction with less effort

Tip Box

While you're waiting for your snacks to cook and crisp, throw a dip or two together using common pantry ingredients like mayo, mustard, sweet soy, sesame seeds and chutney. This is the perfect way to use the last bits of sauces that are running low and tend to go to waste.

10 REASONS WE LOVE OUR AIR FRYER

We really love a good chicken wing

Make the crispiest, juiciest wings you've ever had in just 15 minutes – simply toss in a little oil or marinade and you're ready to fry! You may never deep fry anything again.

We love to dip, dunk and SNACK

Make a batch of skinny fries, skin-on potatoes or crisp up just about any format of potato, tempura veggies or other dip-friendly bites in 15 minutes or less. For fries, opt for tossing them in a teaspoon of good-quality oil, season and let the air fryer do the rest.

We love cooking smart

If you don't have a model with more than one basket, make sure to tackle your prep in order of stability. Make your meatier bits first, followed by slower-cooking veggies and then tackle the quicker ingredients so they end up all warm or in the same basket to finish off at the same time.

We're all about saving lots of energy

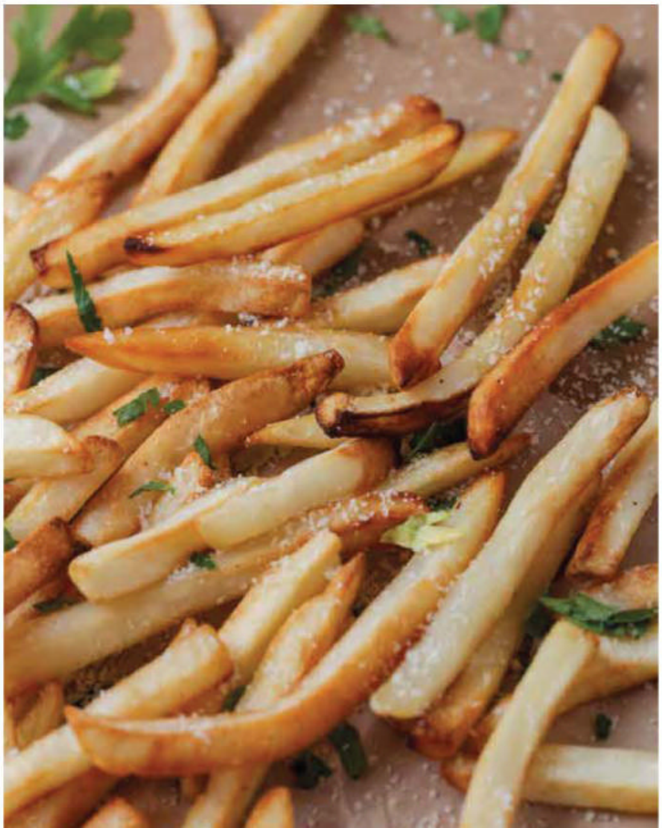
With load-shedding at its height, an air fryer is up to 80% more energy efficient than a conventional oven – it's a game changer for the planet and your pocket!

We're busy folks with schedules and families

An air fryer needs no pre-heating. Cook your favourite snacks and meals (from toasted cheese to roast chicken) in less time than a conventional oven – minus the guilt and compromise on texture!

Product Tip

The Instant Pot Duo Crisp & Air Fryer is an electric pressure cooker AND an air fryer – simply swap out your lids according to cooking tasks! Already have an air fryer? Don't forget that much like with an oven, foil is your friend – use it to compartmentalise and easily swap batches out while cooking.



We're all about simplicity and saving counter space

Investing in a duo appliance is always a winner, and when all else fails an air fryer's versatility wins every time.

We think life is too short for extra dishes

Cook an entire meal in your air fryer – and simply wash the non-stick basket in warm, soapy water, that's it!

We're treating our bodies like a temple, well, mostly

Roast fish, vegetables, sweet potatoes, chicken or meat with just a splash of oil and enjoy the locked-in flavour and goodness.

We appreciate a good batch cook

Reduce meal prep time by up to 70% by using an air fryer to roast, bake or air fry your meal components. Then use it to reheat your pre-cooked meals without the fear of sog.

We love a baked treat

Most things an oven can do, an air fryer can do – and in less time. It's worth tinkering to find out which moist goodies are your go-tos in a time pinch.

Try this Air Fryer Salmon recipe courtesy of Instant Pot

SCAN ME

Panko & parmesan-crusted loin chops with papaya salsa

Prepare these crunchy parmesan-crusted pork chops with delicious sweet papaya salsa, and surprise your guests with something different the next time you want to entertain in style!

SCAN ME FOR THIS DELICIOUS RECIPE

PREP TIME 10 MINUTES COOKING TIME 30 MINUTES

SEARED STEAK

Mariam Jakoet-Harris, a caterer, teacher and passionate home cook, began sharing her air fryer lessons online during the 2020 pandemic. This is one of her most well-loved recipes.

700 g ribeye (thickness is 13 mm) steak at room temp. Pat it dry with a roller towel

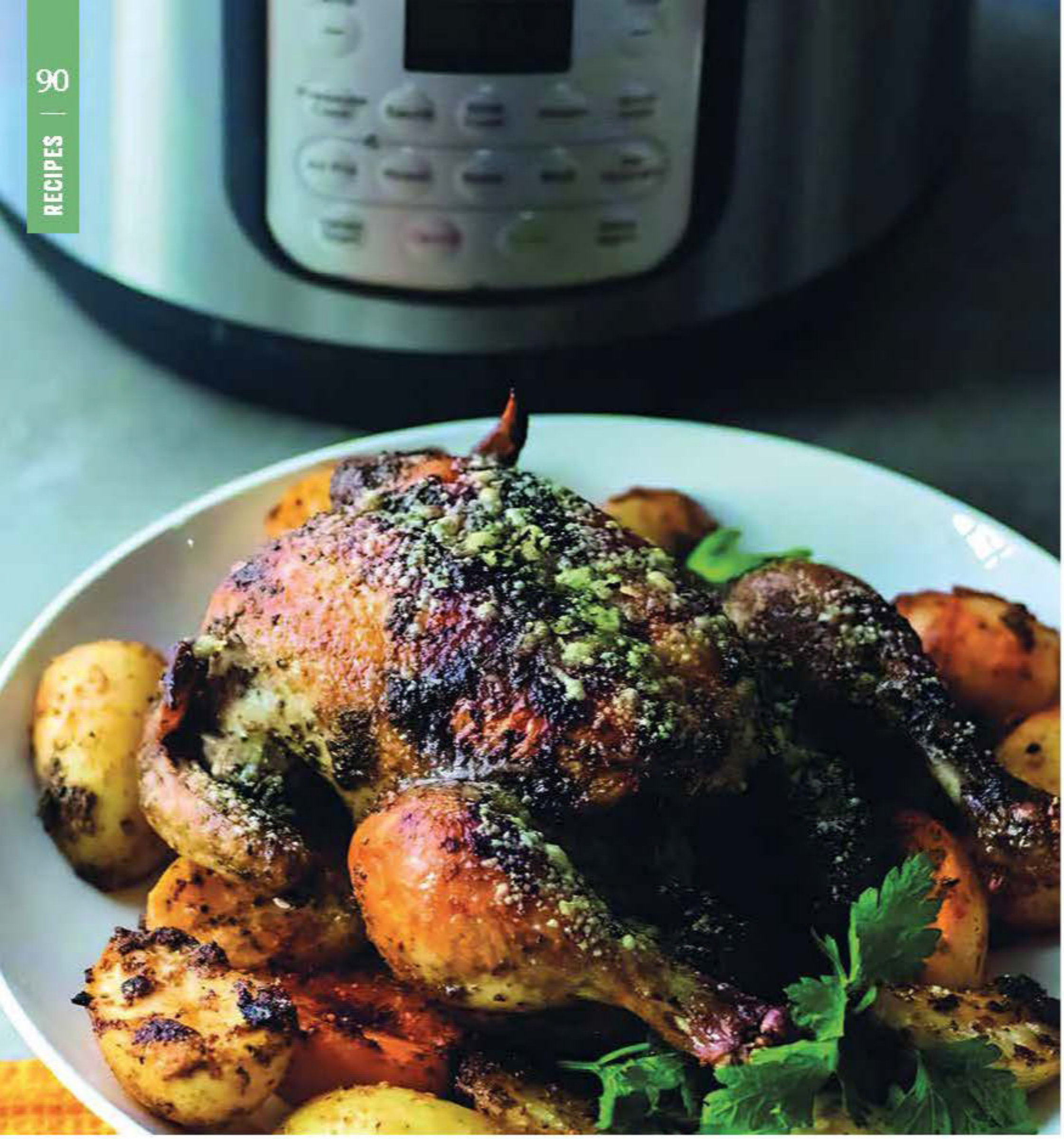
1 tbsp of olive oil

Season with sea salt and cracked black pepper

1. Put your steak into your air fryer (no need to preheat).
2. Set your temp to 82°C.
3. Set your timer for 50 min (if your steak is thinner, reduce time to 40 min. If you prefer medium rare, reduce to 40 min).
4. Once time has elapsed remove from the air fryer.
5. Get a pan or cast-iron griddle searing hot. Place your steak into the pan. Allow it to cook for 2–3 min until it forms a crust. Flip it and repeat on the other side.
6. Brush with basting sauce or finish with a knob of garlic butter (optional). Let it rest for 8 min and then slice.
7. Sprinkle with salt to taste.
8. Garnish with fresh herbs of your choice (optional).

Tip Box

All prep can be done ahead of time and you can sear before eating.



LEMON & HERB ROAST CHICKEN

Local star chef and author Sinoyolo Sifo, aka Sifo The Cooking Husband, is also an air fryer fan, sharing his tried-and-tested recipes on his hugely popular Instagram feed.

3	tbsp (45 ml) olive oil
2	large lemons, juice freshly squeezed
1	tbsp garlic salt
1	tbsp paprika
45	grams Weber Zesty Lemon & Herb Chicken Marinade
1	medium whole chicken (about 1 kg)
	Salt and pepper, to taste
50	grams Parmesan cheese, grated

1. In a small bowl mix together olive oil, lemon juice, garlic salt, paprika and Lemon & Herb Chicken Marinade. Mix well until it becomes a paste.

2. Wash the chicken. Pat dry using a paper towel. Season with salt and pepper. Coat the chicken with the paste mixture. Transfer into a large bowl, cover with cling wrap and let it rest for 2–3 hours.

3. Put the chicken and a cup of stock in your air fryer and close. Cook on a low setting for at least 20 minutes, checking that the chicken is cooking through without crisping on the outside. Depending on your air fryer and model, this could take up to 20 minutes more – it's not an exact science.

4. Remove the chicken from its basket and clean the inner chamber. Place back in the clean inner chamber and close the air fryer lid. Air fry for 15 minutes at 180°C. After 15 minutes increase the temperature to 200°C, sprinkle Parmesan on the chicken and continue to air fry for 5 minutes (the chicken will be golden brown with Parmesan crisp on the outside).

5. Place the chicken on a chopping board and let it rest for 5–10 minutes before cutting, carving or portioning to serve with your favourite winter sides.

THE CULINARY CARTEL'S AIR FRYER CHOCOLATE BIRTHDAY CAKE

SCAN ME

the_culinary_cartel

BASHIERA PARKER'S AIR FRYER FRENCH TOAST

SCAN ME

bparkss_

CHEF NALEDI'S ROASTED PUMPKIN

SCAN ME

chef_naledi

TEXT, PHOTOS AND RECIPES: COURTESY OF INSTANT POT AND ITS AMBASSADORS; ADDITIONAL WORDS: STEFANIE TITUS; ADDITIONAL PHOTOS: GALLO/GETTYIMAHES, UNSPLASH

EXCITING NEWS!

JOZI 4 AUTISM
a community initiative

Jozi 4 Autism has launched an online store!
Go check out our cool autism acceptance apparel

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Proceeds will go towards supporting autism projects in & around Johannesburg.

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Pick your tee colour

Wear your tee to show autism acceptance!

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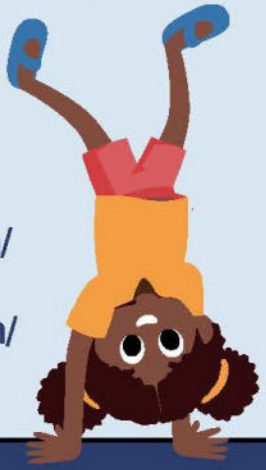


JOHANNESBURG AUTISM FOUNDATION NPC, 2017 / 520735 / 08

High on the Hog(sback)

The Bakers escape the biting cold of autumn in the Highveld and find relief at the ruins of South Africa's oldest kingdom ... Mapungubwe!

Sometimes the warmest travel memories are made in the heart of winter. It may seem like I'm trying to make the best out of a bitter situation, but just like its warmer siblings, winter offers travellers a unique charm.

For many South Africans, winter is an uncomfortable time that's best spent indoors – preferably in front of a heat source. However, veteran local travellers also know that between May and August, travelling becomes far gentler on the wallet.

And, although all corners of the country experience the colder months differently, some nooks and crannies reveal a secret side when the thermometer begins to fall. In my case, I had never seen or touched snow in my life, and that's as good a reason as any to pack the car and head out in pursuit of a winter getaway.

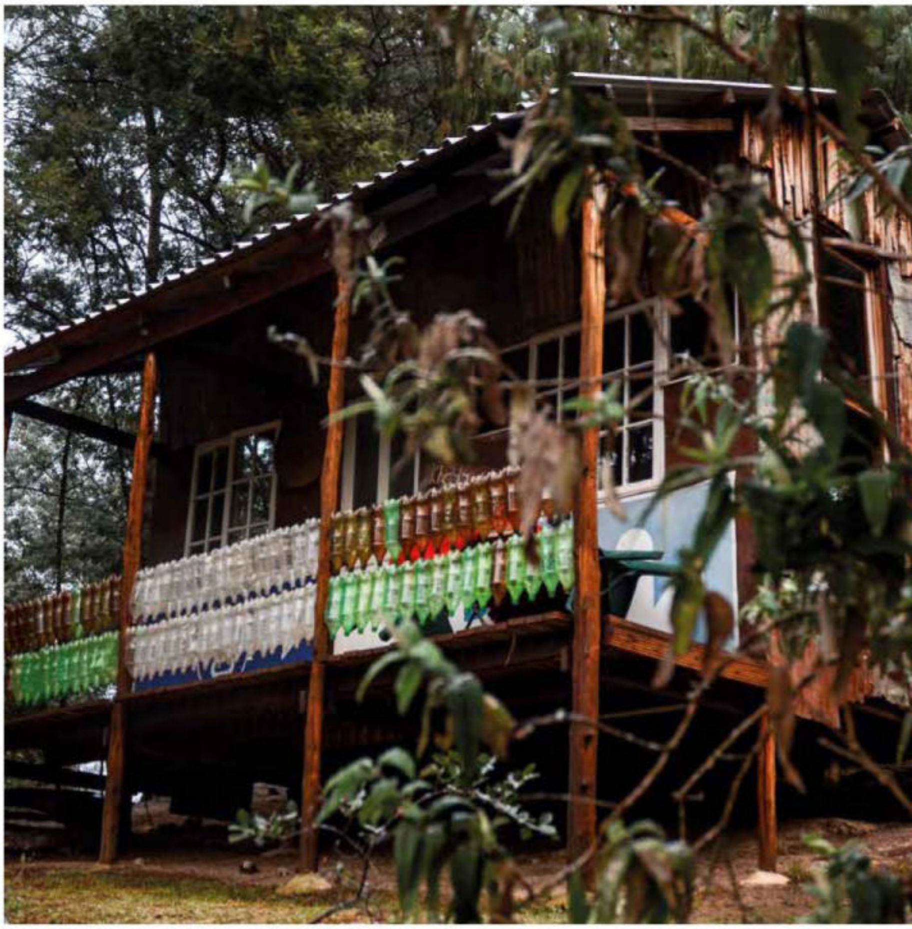
Into the Amatole Mountains

Most travellers heading to the Eastern Cape tend to gravitate towards the Wild Coast, where endless beaches meet rolling pastures and tarred roads are few and far between. The inland Eastern Cape is certainly far less travelled.

Hogsback itself is tucked high in the Amatole Mountains, which are home to some of our continent's southernmost Afromontane forests. It's a landscape dominated by African giants, including white pear, ironwood, Cape holly and two species of yellowwood.

The Amatole forest is one of the largest in the country, and to this day, people claim that J.R.R. drew inspiration from the region for many of the forests in his *The Lord of the Rings* legendarium.

In reality, the inspiration worked the other way around. Back in the 1940s, locals built a holiday camp for underprivileged children called Hobbiton on Hogsback, named for the famous hobbit village. Once you arrive in Hogsback, it's easy to see why.



↑ Rustic Digs
This was our chalet at Terra-Khaya. These huts are insulated using all kinds of upcycled materials and are tucked away in forests typical of Hogsback.

← Snowy Vistas
A Terra-Khaya backpacker watches as snow falls on the hilly Hogsback landscape.

> “
> *Even in the depth of winter, it seems to emanate an aura of high fantasy mixed with a bit of English countryside charm*

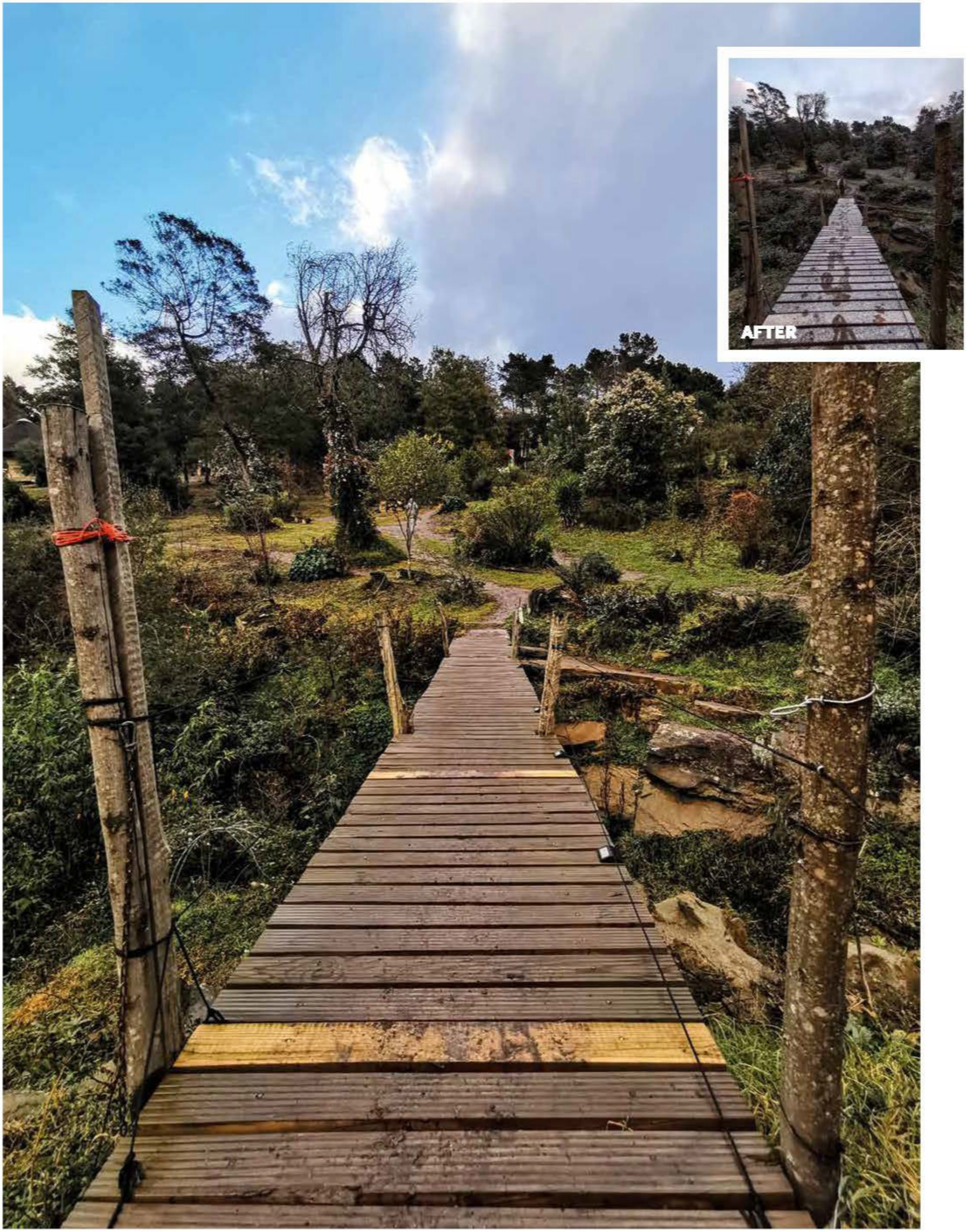
Even in the depth of winter, it seems to emanate an aura of high fantasy mixed in with a little bit of English countryside charm. A long history of forestry means that some of the indigenous forest has been replaced with exotic species.

In fact, the local arboretum, which is nearly 150 years old, is home to the largest California redwood trees in South Africa, as well as English oaks, Japanese cedars and Monterey pine. This carefully curated sanctuary now shelters rare Cape parrots and near-endemic Knysna turacos.

The town is also famous for its various waterfalls. These range in size from the aptly-named and relatively short 39 Steps Falls to the Madonna and Child Waterfall, which drops over the edge of a rocky outcrop.

The village's main road boasts a tourism office, a supermarket, and an eclectic arrangement of local stores. It's also lined by dozens of local artists who, most famously, shape little hogs out of red clay, scouring the name of the town onto their sides and adorning their backs with recycled brushes and white paint.

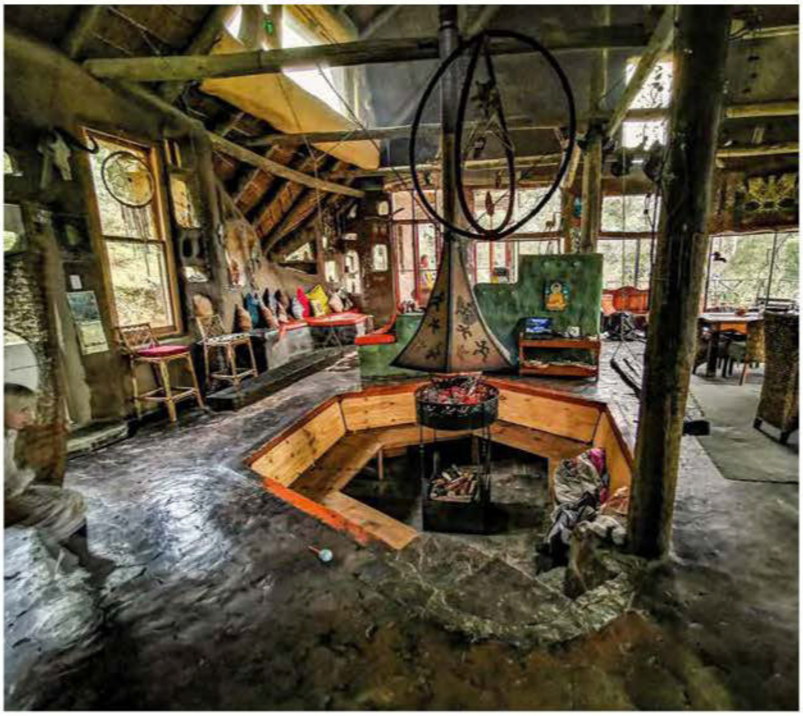
It's this very clay that gave Hogsback its original isiXhosa name, *Qabimbola*. It means 'red clay on the face', alluding to the soil's use as traditional face paint.


AFTER

← Crossing Over
Guests are required to carry their luggage across this footbridge to get to Terra-Khaya's cosy lodgings.

← Winter Wonderland
This photo was taken just minutes after the previous one, demonstrating how sudden snowfall can be in this region.

Fireside Chats ↓
The interior of Terra-Khaya's main building, features an elevated fireplace and several cosy seating areas.



TEXT & PHOTOS: MICKY BAKER

On the Transience of Snow

Hogsback's muddy roads crawl up slopes, plummet toward sheer cliffs, and wind into unseen corners of forest where offbeat locals have set down roots of their own. Being a tourism-driven village, Hogsback is chock-full of accommodation options, but some are radically different to others.

A prime example is Away With the Fairies, a nature lodge and backpackers famous for its unique ablution facilities. Visitors flock from all over the world to soak in the world's most scenic bathtub, which overlooks Auckland Nature Reserve – considered by many to be the oldest individual forest in South Africa.

Even more off-centre is Terra-Khaya, a quirky eco-lodge and working farm that attracts a real assortment of characters. It's totally off-grid, so guests are kindly asked to 'walk lightly' and respect the farm's principles of conscious living and sustainability.

As soon as we arrived, we were excitedly ushered towards a tiny barn by one of the farm volunteers. Inside, a mother goat was nursing her day-old kids, and we were gently encouraged to hold one in our arms. It was a warm welcome that set the tone for our time in this remarkable place.

The magic didn't stop there – or not for me, at least. Just ten minutes prior, Hogsback had been a balmy autumn landscape, and the sun was out in full force. But a thick layer of snow had quickly fallen while we were playing with the goats, transforming Terra-Khaya into a genuine winter wonderland.

Growing up, I had listened to my school friends talk about seeing snow in Ceres, but I never had the chance. I stood in the flurry of white, humbled by a weather phenomenon that many people take for granted, but before I could form my first snowball, the sun made a resplendent comeback and began melting the sleet away.

> “
> *No matter where you are in the world, a fire is a place to connect with other people*

Like a Warm, Orange Hug

Hauling our bags across the slippery terrain, we were welcomed into Terra-Khaya's main hub, which – like everything else on the farm – was built using eco-friendly techniques. It houses the communal kitchen and the largest assortment of blankets and scatter cushions you'll ever see, all surrounding a massive indoor fire pit that's kept burning all day and all night.

Guests can choose between camping, dormitories, or private rooms, and the latter is certainly the best option in winter. Outside of the main building, warmth is hard to come by, so each eco-chalet is equipped with its own assemblage of quilts and blankets.

Showering is an adventure in its own right. With no electricity to speak of, the 'donkey' geysers are heated by ever-burning fires, in turn fuelled by invasive black wattle wood. It's a real team effort to keep the embers glowing, but the resulting piping-hot showers are a welcome reprieve from the sub-zero temperatures.

It's then a race to layer up and get back to the firepit before sunset, where you're welcomed by a hearty, wholesome meal prepared by the Terra-Khaya team.

This is the heart of Terra-Khaya, especially in winter, and the lodge encourages guests to join its communal meals. No matter where you are in the world, a fire is a place to connect with other people and share ideas, and we spent two nights connecting with some truly fascinating people.

Some of Terra-Khaya's guests are just passing through, while others stay indefinitely, working and farming to pay their way. The entire place feels like a kind of commune, attracting people who value simplicity and experiences over luxury and excess.

I left Terra-Khaya with a new perspective on my relationship with the planet – and a newfound appreciation for beanies, gloves, and fires...

Winter Games

Is the weather keeping you and your pet cooped up indoors and bouncing off the walls? Here are ways to keep them entertained when it's too cold to go outside

BY HELEN WALLACE

If only we could go into hibernation and sleep the winter months away in a cosy bed. Alas, life goes on, for us and our pets. When they aren't able to go outdoors to play, sniff, hunt and socialise, our furry friends have no way of releasing their energy, which becomes pent up and can lead to boredom and behavioural problems. Not fun for anyone!

If you are worried that the chilly season ahead and being cooped up inside is going to take a toll on your pets – and your sanity! – here's how to keep them entertained indoors.

PRACTISE TRAINING

We might think our pets are perfect but most of them could probably do with a refresher course on manners and obedience. If you have that sorted, maybe there are some tricks you'd like them to learn. There's always room for more learning, right? By doing some training with them you can ensure that they are behaving how they should and also get them thinking, which is a great source of stimulation. They might even be more exhausted after a training session than after a walk!

PLAY A GAME

Playing a game with your pet redirects their energy away from chewing up your favourite rug by engaging them in something more fun!

1. Hide the Treat

This is a game that is great for your pet's brain and belly and it requires minimal effort on your part! While your animal is in another room or being kept occupied elsewhere, take some small treats and hide them around the house in creative places. Then let them loose and let their noses get to work.

2. Fetch!

Do you have a ball-crazy fur kid in your family? This one works best for people who have a long passage or corridor in their house. Remove anything fragile, such as picture frames on the walls, and you can play a traditional game of fetch. You can replace the ball with a pair of socks if you are concerned about damage.

3. Make Mealtime Fun

The pet industry is a big one and there are tons of products on the market aimed at keeping our pets engaged. Some of these puzzle-feeding toys are designed to be used at mealtimes to make them more fun and interactive. Switch out the regular bowls for one of these and voila – food time is also game time!

HOST A PLAYDATE

An activity that can be fulfilling for both pets and owners is to organise a playdate as bringing more people and their animals into your home can be exciting and kill the indoor boredom – at least for a few hours! If your fur kid has a buddy, invite them and their owners for snacks and a game. Allow the animals to meet in the garden before allowing them inside and make sure that they are supervised at all times in case a fight breaks out.

TREAT TIME

Sometimes the most effective way to keep your menagerie calm and quiet is to give them something to nibble on. There are plenty of treat-dispensing toys on the market that deliver snacks and stimulation. You can also give them long-lasting chews. Remember: Winter weight gain can be a struggle not just for people but our pets, too! If you are using treats to entertain and reward your fur kid, this should be considered when it comes to feeding time and less food should be given to account for the extra snacks.

DRESS CODE

Are you and your pet going to venture out into the great – and cold! – outdoors? Make sure that they have the appropriate protective gear on, such as a jacket or waterproof coat and, in some cases, boots, to keep them warm and comfortable while they're outside.

MAKE DIY TOYS

Tired of games and want your pet to entertain themselves? That's where toys come in (and they don't have to cost a thing, either!).

1. Rope Ball

As the name suggests, all you need is a rope and a tennis ball to make a toy that will be Fido's new favourite! Drill two holes, one on each side of a tennis ball, string the rope through and then tie the two ends of the rope together so it forms a loop. Now it can be a chew or a tug toy!

2. String Toy

Cats love to flex their hunting instincts, which is why they enjoy toys with moving objects. Making one for your feline friend is also really simple. Make a pom-pom or gather some feathers and tie them to the end of a piece of string. Tie the string to a stick and you'll have a toy to dangle over your kitty.

3. Your Recycling Pile

Animals really don't require much when it comes to toys and anything can become a fun object. This goes for many items we commonly throw away or recycle. A box or piece of string can provide hours of entertainment for cats, and many dogs would love to destroy a toilet roll tube or play tug-of-war with you and a laddered pair of pantyhose.

PHOTOS: GALLO/GETTYIMAGES

Weathering WINTER

'Tis the season to embrace the chill, turn your home into a cosy, well-organised space and flex those creative muscles

BY MEGAN PAULSE

Winter has arrived and with it comes the bittersweet isolation of the cold. While fires blaze in some homes, others are busy wrapping up in cosy jammies, fluffy socks and the blankets that are just the right tog to only be welcome in winter.

While glancing through this window and that – usually from a fave pastry spot or on a drive for errands or to a meeting – I wonder what to do from a different perspective every year... Just why is winter so very bittersweet? Is it that as humans we are prone to dissatisfaction no matter where we find ourselves? Is it the confusing darkness as we adjust to shorter days or added padding with every step outdoors? Or is it simply that so many people prefer sunshine, outdoor entertaining and comfortable, airy layers that are easy to throw on?

I think I may never personally be convinced of any one reason because not only do I mostly adore all that winter represents (including hibernation and being far less social) – I think it's the perfect time for the neglected parts of homemaking. Need time to scour the internet for the perfect new sofa? You're likely to have more attention span for reading and life admin with less places to run off to and a lesser urgency and rush to keep busy for fear of missing out – not to mention, more budget to spend on bigger investment pieces.

Been putting off your next Marie Kondo moment? Now is the time to tackle that chaotic linen closet to donate your never-been-used or over-the-hill blankets to someone in need (especially in SA's crazy cold winters) and create space for the hobby box you need to light you up creatively.

If, like in my household, you've committed to trying to cut down on plastic, and have instead fallen down a rabbit hole of saved glass containers – now is the time to catch up on pickling, drop a box of jars and goodies off at a charity shop and perhaps experiment with some cheap LED string lights in jars for load-shedding and date-night atmosphere.

Now is essentially the perfect time to take a hard look around you and make it exactly how you'd want it if you were staging your dream home ... complete with thoughtful still-life settings, pretty blanket baskets for visitors to cosy up with, and a reordered book collection.

You might even find that by creating an environment that makes you feel good, reading the books you've bought becomes a beautiful way to listen to the sound of rain, wind and even a few thoughts you've not allowed time to unpack.

Why anticipate the blues, lose sight of the privilege of comfort and wish this time away? Enjoy where you are, for what it is, knowing that like with every season, this too shall pass. Winter is an opportunity to be still and find new ways to bring warmth into your life, reconnect with your loved ones, and cross a few decor projects off your to-do list.

PHOTO: UNSPLASH

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